NATION

Pune seals 19 RO water plants amid GBS outbreak

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BUSINESS

Zomato Ltd rebranded as Eternal in 'ambitious move', food app retains name

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SPORTS

Gill, bowlers shine as India ease past England by 4 wkts

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SALAR

DIGITAL ENGLISH DAILY, BENGALURU

ساڈھ روزنامہ بنگلور

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Another exit poll predicts BJP's Delhi win

Axis My India exit poll has predicted a comeback for BJP in Delhi. Here is its prediction.

BJP: 45-55
AAP: 15-25
Cong: 0-1

TOTAL SEATS: 70
MAJORITY: 36

RBI Guv likely to announce 1st rate cut in 5 yrs today

MUMBAI, 6 FEB

New Reserve Bank of India (RBI) Governor Sanjay Malhotra is set to announce a significant decision from the Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) on Friday morning, with widespread expectations of a 25 basis points reduction in the repo rate, bringing it to 6.25 per cent. This marks the first cut in nearly five years following a prolonged pause since February 2023. Economists from DBS Group Research and BofA Global Research anticipate a unanimous decision, citing softening growth and inflation data. While industry body Assocham expects easing monetary conditions, some experts, like YES Securities' Amar Ambani, do not foresee a rate cut. *—PTI*

January 2025 was warmest on record

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The planet experienced its warmest January on record last month despite the development of La Nina, a climate pattern that usually brings cooler global temperatures, the European climate agency said on Thursday. This comes on the heels of the Earth experiencing its hottest year on record in 2024, also the first to see global average temperatures rise 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. According to the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S), January 2025 recorded an average temperature of 13.23 degrees Celsius, 0.09 degrees warmer than the previous hottest January (2024) and 0.79 degrees above the 1991-2020 average. Scientists also found that the Earth's temperature in January was 1.75 degrees Celsius higher than pre-industrial levels. Global temperatures have stayed above the 1.5-degree mark for 18 of the last 19 months. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 5

Discovery team officials threatened over Asaram's docu

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Supreme Court on Thursday granted interim protection to the officials of Discovery Communications India who are allegedly facing threats after the release of the documentary series 'Cult of Fear: Asaram Bapu'. The order of the top court came on a petition filed by Discovery Communications India and its senior staff based in different states. *—PTI*

>>>More on Page 4

Chained & handcuffed: US sends back Indians

EAM says it is US' standard operation procedure & India is in talks with US over mistreatment

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The "American Dream" quickly turned into a nightmare for 104 Indian nationals who were deported from the United States on Wednesday on charges of being illegal immigrants. Their return to India sparked widespread criticism, as reports suggest they were subjected to harsh treatment during their 40-hour journey aboard a US military aircraft.

According to the deportees, they were handcuffed and shackled for the duration of the flight, with their feet tied in chains.

A video by US Border Patrol shared on X showed Indian deportees being led into the plane with hands cuffed and feet shackled, which prevented from moving from their seats.

One deportee, Harwinder Singh, recounted the harrowing experience: "After repeated requests, we were allowed to drag ourselves to the washroom. The crew would open the door to the lavatory and shove us in." There was only one washroom for 104 people.

In response to the growing criticism, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar addressed the issue in the Rajya Sabha on Thursday. He said the use of restraints in deportation flights is part of the US' standard operating procedure (SOP). "However, we have been informed that women and children are not restrained," he said. He added that the government is engaging with the US to ensure that deported Indians are not mistreated.

Later, responding to clarifications by Opposition members on the issue, he said India had given the aircraft clearance after verifying the people.

He stressed that the focus should be on the crackdown on the illegal migration industry.

On the issue of several deportees having properties in the US, the minister said authorities here are working with those deported and getting details to work out a solution. "It is up to authority of immigration and custom to charter an aircraft, the procedure, whether it was military or chartered aircraft, was exactly the same," he said, amid an uproar by Opposition members.

However, after his speech Budget session saw Oppostion members protesting on the issue. *—PTI*

>>>More on Pages 3 & 4

A video shared by US Border Patrol showed Indian deportees being led into the plane with hands cuffed and feet shackled

NUMBER OF INDIANS DEPORTED FROM THE US

2009:	2019:
734	2,042
2024:	**2025:**
1,368	104

"Let us not make it seem like this is a new issue. It has been happening for some time
—S Jaishankar, EAM

BJP govt secured transgender rights: PM in RS

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Prime Minister Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Thursday underscored BJP government's dedication to the ideals of "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas", citing its efforts to secure legal rights for the transgender community and to empower marginalised sections.

Replying to the discussion in the Rajya Sabha on the Motion of Thanks on the President's address, Modi highlighted the government's focus on the development and the implementation of welfare schemes.

"Our approach of saturation ensures that schemes reach beneficiaries without pilferages. Over the last decade, our commitment to "Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas" has yielded tangible results," he said. *—Agencies*

FLYING HIGH

Surya Kiran Aerobatic Team performs during the final rehearsal ahead of Aero India 2025' in Bengaluru's Yelahanka on Thursday
PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD

B'desh protests against India over Hasina's activities

DHAKA/NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Bangladesh has lodged a diplomatic protest with India's acting envoy over what it terms "false and fabricated comments" made by deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina during a recent virtual address from exile in India. The protest follows violent demonstrations in Dhaka, where Hasina's ancestral home was vandalised and set alight, alongside attacks on properties of Awami League leaders.

Foreign Affairs Adviser M Touhid Hossain met India's deputy high commissioner to deliver the protest note, expressing concern over Hasina's "highly aggressive" comments and their potential to incite unrest in Bangladesh. He stated that the Bangladeshi foreign ministry previously urged New Delhi to prevent such activities but received no response.

Hasina, who has been in India since August following her party's downfall, called for resistance against the current government during her speech. Hossain's statement emphasised that Hasina's remarks were seen as a "hostile act" and detrimental to Bangladesh-India relations. *—PTI*

K'taka likely to introduce Hate Speech Bill in Budget Session

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

The state government is set to introduce the Hate Crimes and Hate Speech (Combat, Prevention and Punishment) Bill, 2025, during the upcoming Budget Session of the Assembly.

The proposed legislation aims to curb hate speech and hate crimes based on caste, religion, gender and other social identifiers.

According to sources, the Bill seeks to define and criminalise hate speech and impose heavy penalties, including imprisonment of up to three years and a fine of Rs 5,000.

The Bill also proposes to bring digital platforms, including social media, search engines and electronic communication channels, under its ambit.

The draft specifies that any form of hate speech – verbal, textual, visual or electronic – will be punishable under this law. In addition, individuals who collect, store or disseminate such content on behalf of others will also be held accountable.

"There is a plan – a proposal. We are still considering whether to come up with a new Bill or amend the existing law," Chief Minister Siddaramaiah said on Thursday.

The CM also pointed out the complexities of digital hate speech, saying, "Information Technology is not a state subject, and we have to ensure we are not infringing upon Central laws." The final shape of the Bill will depend on legislative discussions. *—Salar News*

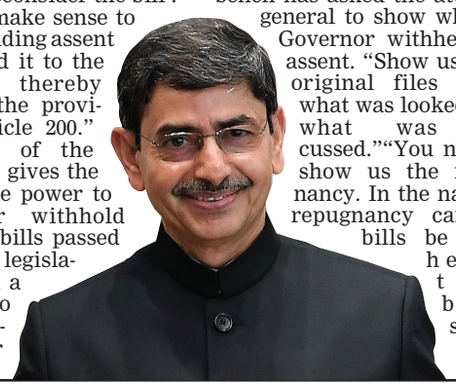
12 BILLS PENDING

Makes no sense: SC raps TN Guv over delay in assent to bills

NEW DELHI, 6 JAN

The Supreme Court questioned the delay on the part of Tamil Nadu Governor R N Ravi over assent to the bills passed by state legislative assembly.

A bench comprising Justices JB Pardiwala and R Mahadevan said, "He (the governor) seems to have adopted his own procedure. He says, 'I withhold assent, but I will not ask you to reconsider the bill'. It does not make sense to keep withholding assent and not send it to the legislature thereby frustrating the provision of Article 200." Article 200 of the Constitution gives the Governor the power to approve or withhold approval of bills passed by the state legislature or send a bill back to the legislature for reconsideration or suggest changes. The bench noted that the Governor took over three years before declaring he was withholding assent on certain bills and referring others to the President. "We are not undermining his powers. Today, we are examining his power to withhold 12 bills duly passed by the state legislature and send two bills to President directly and then say I withhold assent." it said. The bench has asked the attorney general to show why the Governor withheld his assent. "Show us some original files as to what was looked into, what was discussed.""You need to show us the repugnancy. In the name of repugnancy can the bills be withheld," the bench said. *—PTI*



Not prosecutor, but persecutor: SC raps UP for defunct cases

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The Supreme Court has strongly reprimanded the Uttar Pradesh government, labelling it a "persecutor" rather than a "prosecutor" after it included defunct cases in its response to a petition concerning the state's anti-gangsters law. A bench comprising Justices BR Gavai and K Vinod Chandran questioned the relevance of cases that had been quashed or resulted in acquittals for the accused.

The court granted bail to four brothers who had challenged the Allahabad High Court's November 2024 ruling denying their bail applications. *—PTI*

TEHZEEB KE RANG ...URDU KE SUNG
JASHN-E-YAUM-E-URDU"
Organized by:
MEHFIL E NISA AND UNITED COUNCIL FOR EDUCATION AND CULTURE, BENGALURU
Date: 8th February 2025 (Saturday) Time: 10:30 AM Venue: Kormangala Indoor Stadium, Bengaluru
Presided by: DR. SHAISTA YUSUF, President of Mehfil e Nisa, Managing Trustee, UCEC Bengaluru.
Inauguration of the Rally By: SHRI RAMALINGA REDDY, Hon'ble Minister for Transport, Government of Karnataka
Time: 9:00 AM Venue: From Koramangala Indoor Stadium Bengaluru To National Games Village, Bengaluru
Chief Guests
DR. K. RAHMAN KHAN, Former Union Minister, Former Deputy Chairman, Rajya Sabha
MR. ZAMEER AHMED KHAN, Minister for Housing, Waqf, and Minority Affairs, Government of Karnataka
MR. NASEER AHMED, Political Secretary to the Chief Minister, Government of Karnataka
MRS. BILKEES BANO, MLC, Government of Karnataka
MAULANA MUHAMMAD ALI QAZI, Chairman, Karnataka Urdu Academy
Guests of Honour
PROF. ALOK RAI, Former Faculty, Department of English, Delhi University
DR. AJAY KUMAR SINGH, Former Director General of Police, Bengaluru
MR. AJAZ ALI JOHRI, Chairman, Hindustan Urdu Manch, Bengaluru
MR N.D. MULLA, Retired DCP Crime Branch, Bengaluru
DR. AZRA NAQVI, Renowned Poet, Writer, and Translator, Delhi.
AWARD CONFERMENT FOR THE YEAR 2025 URDU DOST AWARD
MR. AZIZULLAH BAIG, Retired IAS
MR. ADONI SYED SALEEM, Retired IAS
MR. M.A. KHALID, Retired KAS
MR. SALAHUDDIN, Retired IAS
MR. MEER ANEES AHMED, Retired IAS
MUMTAZ SHIREEN AWARD
MR. MOHAMMED AYAZUDDIN PATEL. GULBARGA, National Award-winning Artist, Lalit Kala Academy, Government of India
Mahmood Ayaz Award: MR. HAMID IQBAL SIDDIQUI, Chairman, Quiz Time, Editor Shair, Mumbai
Shaan-e-Nisa: SHAISTA NAAZ, Shaheen College, Bidar
MASTER OF CEREMONY
Prof. SABIHA ZUBAIR
Organizing Committee: * DR. MAHNOOR ZAMANI * DR. HALEEMA FIRDOUS * DR. ZUBAIDA BEGUM * DR. FAREEDA RAHMATULLAH (Trusties, Mehfil e Nisa, Bengaluru)
*AZIZULLAH BAIG * SYED ABRAR * ASLAM PASHA * IQBAL AHMED BAIG (Trustees, United Council for Education and Culture, Bengaluru)
All are cordially invited

Ensure ample parking space in metro stns: DKS

BALLARI, 6 FEB

The government has issued an instruction to the Bengaluru Metro Rail Corporation Limited (BMRCL) to ensure that future metro stations are equipped with ample parking spaces for both cars and bikes. Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar, who also oversees the Bengaluru Development Ministry, gave the directive on Thursday, emphasizing the need for sufficient parking at all metro stations along upcoming metro lines in a bid to ease traffic congestion across the city.

Shivakumar acknowledge that the current parking facilities at metro stations were inadequate, forcing commuters to park their vehicles on nearby road, thereby exacerbating traffic. "Earmarking sufficient parking space for the next 20-30 years will help alleviate this problem." Shivakumar also confirmed the government plans to construct double-decker-road-cum-flyovers along proposed metro lines. The third phase of 'Namma Metro', which will connect JP Nagar to Kempapura, will feature a double-decker flyover. He said the project, with an additional cost of approximately Rs 9,800 crore, will be co-funded by BBMP and BMRCL, with the state government covering the expenses.. To boost revenue for metro projects, Shivakumar said that advertisements will be displayed on metro pillars, with the proceeds to be shared between BBMP and BMRCL. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Reels with weapons land five behind bars

KALABURAGI, 6 FEB

Sleuths from Vishwavidyanilaya Police Station in the city have arrested five persons for allegedly making reels holding weapons and sharing them on social media. The police identified the arrested persons as Ghulam Nabi alias Bilal, 21, Muhammad Parvez, 27, Sheikh Shoaib, 22, Syed Qadir, 24, and Aslam Pasha, 24, all residents of Azadpur's Umar Colony and Gareeb Nawaz Colony. Police made the arrests on Wednesday. They have registered a case against Ghulam Nabi under Section 28 of the Indian Arms Act. The other four have been booked under Section 129 BNSS (PAR), police said. "Some youths were seen holding deadly weapons and imitation pistols in videos, which they shared on social media, creating fear among the public," a police officer said. The police have confiscated the weapons and other items, said a statement from the city police commissioner's office. *—Salar News*

PHOTO: SALAR

Noted writer Hari Hara Priya honoured

KOLAR, 6 FEB

In recognition of his contribution to literature and considering his ill health, Sri Devaraj Urs Academy of Higher Studies, Kolar, on Thursday honoured veteran writer Hari Hara Priya and presented him a purse of Rs 1 lakh as a good will gesture. Hari Hara Priya hails from Malur in Kolar district and is around 80 years old. He is contemporary of noted writers such as Dr UR Ananthamurthy. He made headlines for setting up Pustaka Mane in Bangalore, a library of his books collection, the doors of which were open to common man. A few months ago, he shifted the Pustaka Mane to Malur. Three months ago, he suffered a heart attack and was admitted to a private hospital where his children had to spend lakhs of rupees. *—Salar News*

Pained by BJP leaders humiliating BSY: Vijayendra

BJP Prez says senior leaders are being mute spectators

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Amid a factional rift within the state unit, State BJP president BY Vijayendra on Thursday expressed displeasure about senior party leaders not stopping some others from making "humiliating" comments against his father and veteran leader BS Yediyurappa.

Vijayendra's statement seems to be directed at several senior party leaders who are seen as "neutral" and not part of any faction in the party.

The factional rift within the party came to light when a group of leaders Vijayendra publicly levelled allegations against him and demanded his removal from the part post, while another group supported him and sought expulsion of those damaging the party's image by openly expressing discontent.

"The state (BJP) president election or selection process may happen any moment. There are indications that the whole process will be completed by 20 February. I have noticed the statements being made by some leaders. I have not reacted to them as it may cause embarrassment to the party and its workers," Vijayendra said.

Stating that he is not bothered by what others, especially seniors in the party are speaking against him, he said, "But, it is unfortunate that low-level language is being used against Yediyurppa, a leader who has built this (state unit of the) party. And sitting quiet looking at all of this is also a sin."

BY Vijayendra *PHOTO: PTI*

Noting that Yediyurappa has been repeatedly humiliated and disrespected during the past year, Vijayendra said, "Whoever may be making statements against him, but it is unfortunate that no one tried to stop them, by saying that it is wrong."

"I request the seniors in the party to at least now try to stop those making statements against Yediyurappa," he said, adding, "I'm pained both as (state BJP) president and Yediyurappa's son that leaders who are neutral and others are not stopping those commenting against the veteran leader." *—PTI*

Bommai unhappy with internal fights

BJP MP and former Chief Minister Basavaraj Bommai on Thursday expressed severe displeasure over the internal bickering within the Karnataka BJP. He urged factions in the party to exercise patience and resolve differences through discussions under the guidance of senior leaders.

"At a time when people, especially farmers and women, are in distress and incidents of violence and suicides are increasing in the state due to the misgovernance of the ruling Congress party, the BJP is facing internal bickering instead of fighting against the government," Bommai said in a statement.

He expressed optimism that the party's senior leadership would soon turn its attention to developments in the Karnataka BJP.

CANNOT ENTER BIDAR

Priyank's aid, 4 others get bail in contractor suicide

BIDAR, 6 FEB

The Kalburgi District and Sessions Court has granted conditional bail to five persons, including Raju Kapanur, the main accused in the case related to young contractor Sachin Panchal's suicide by jumping in front of a train in Bidar on 26 December.

Kapanur, a close aide of minister Priyank Kharge, received the bail on his birthday.

The four others who were granted conditional bail on Wednesday are Nandakumar Nagabhujange, Gorakhnath, Satish and Ramanagara Gowda. They were expected to be released from jail on Thursday.

The conditions for the bail are: If the applicant has weapons, they should be handed over to the Kalaburgi District Superintendent of Police. They should not try to destroy evidence but cooperate with the investigation. They should not enter Bidar district for any reason except when specifically summoned by the investigating officer or to appear before the court after the investigation is completed.

The court said that these conditions will apply till the conclusion of the final hearing.

Panchal had left a death note before taking his own life. *—Salar News*

- The four others who were granted conditional bail on Wednesday are Nandakumar Nagabhujange, Gorakhnath, Satish and Ramanagara Gowda.

Two workers charred to death as fire breaks in City building

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Two migrant workers lost their lives in a fire that broke out on Thursday afternoon in an under-construction four-storey building at Shivani Greens Residential Layout in Seegehalli.

Preliminary investigations indicate that a gas leak may have caused the fire.

The police identified the victims as Roshan, 23, a native of Bihar, and Uday Bhanu, 40, from Uttar Pradesh. Roshan was employed as a painter, while Uday worked as a carpenter. A third labourer managed to escape with minor injuries after he climbed on to the water tank on the terrace.

The fire broke out around 11am, triggering panic among neighbours, who swiftly alerted the jurisdictional police and the fire department. Four fire tenders were deployed to the site.

The building, situated near Kadabagere Cross, is reportedly owned by a businessman named Satish. At least eight workers used to stay at the site and they prepared their meals within the premises.

Authorities are also probing the possibility of welding sparks igniting the blaze. Sources at the scene told Salar News that the workers had allegedly taken a temporary electrical connection for woodwork.

Meanwhile, the police said they found highly inflammable materials on the fourth floor of the building.

Madanayakanahalli police have registered a case and started an investigation. The bodies were sent to Nelamangala General Hospital for post-mortem examination.

Bitcoin scam: Nalapad appears before SIT

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Karnataka Pradesh Youth Congress Committee President Mohammed Haris Nalapad appeared before a special investigation team (SIT) of the Karnataka CID on Thursday to take part in the Bitcoin scam probe.

Mohammed and his brother Omar Haris, were questioned in June 2024 too for over two days with regard to the payments made by them for expenses incurred by hacker Srikrishna Ramesh alias Sriki, including his stay at luxury hotels, travel and other expenses between 2017 and 2018.

Ramesh was arrested in November 2020.

Mohammed and Omar are sons of Congress MLA N A Haris, the chairman of the Bangalore Development Authority. Sources said the SIT is reported to be in the process of finalising two charge sheets in the Bitcoin scam in which police officers have allegedly destroyed evidence and embezzled cryptocurrency.

Mohammed Haris Nalapad *PHOTO: FB*

The SIT began its investigation into the Bitcoin scam in June 2023. There is no record of direct financial transactions between the hacker and the Nalapad brothers, including their fund manager. However, Ramesh told the CID in 2021, following his arrest for a hacking incident at the government's e-procurement portal in July 2019 that resulted in a Rs 11.5 crore heist, that he had made an "investment" of 150 Bitcoin and 1,100 Ethereum with Mohammed after meeting the brothers in 2017. *—PTI*

AERO SHOW PREP

IAF jets and para glider perform during final rehearsal ahead of Aero India 2025 at Yelahanka Air Force Station in Bengaluru as children cheer in awe. The Aero Show will be from 10 to 14 February *PHOTOS: MOHAMMED ASAD*

Ex-BJP minister Krishnaiah convicted in ₹7.17 cr fraud

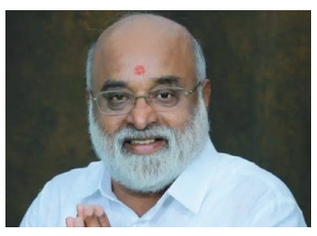
BENGALURU, 6 FEB

A special court in Bengaluru has convicted former Karnataka Minister and BJP leader Malur Krishnaiah Shetty in a fraud case amounting to Rs 7.17 crore. Judge Santosh Gajanana Bhat determined that Shetty, alongside three co-defendants, had defrauded a private bank using forged documents. The sentence has yet to be announced.

The Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) conducted an inquiry based on a complaint from the bank. Shetty and his accomplices, Srinivas and Muniraju, were found guilty of multiple charges, including criminal conspiracy and forgery, stemming from fraudulent activities dating back to 1993.

Shetty, through his firm Balaji Krupa Enterprises, had promised housing board loans to employees of public sector enterprises. By fabricating documents in their names, he secured bank loans, of which Rs 3.53 crore remains unpaid.

A former MLA from Maluru and close associate of ex-Karnataka Chief Minister B S Yediyurappa, Shetty has experienced political turbulence, switching allegiance between the BJP and Congress. He lost the 2023 Karnataka assembly elections as an independent candidate. His conviction adds to his mounting legal challenges as sentencing approaches. *—PTI*



Malur Krishnaiah Shetty *PHOTO:X*

Deve Gowda lauds PM Modi in RS

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Former prime minister HD Deve Gowda on Thursday praised Prime Minister Narendra Modi in the Rajya Sabha, calling him the "tallest leader" who can run the country with his vast leadership experiences.

Participating in the discussion on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address, Gowda said that he must congratulate Modi who selected a "backward woman" as the President.

The veteran Janata Dal (Secular) leader recounted the Opposition's allegations that Modi government was "communal" and "enemy to federal structure" and said when he (Modi) did not get full majority in the third term, regional parties came together to solidly support him.

The JD(S) is an ally of the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance.

Gowda said Modi knows how to run the administration as he has got experience as prime minister and chief minister. "He is the only tallest leader in this country who can run the country," Gowda said. *—PTI*

DK Shivakumar *PHOTO: PTI*

Do not believe in Delhi exit polls, says Shivakumar

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

With several exit polls predicting a victory for the BJP in the Delhi Assembly elections, Karnataka Deputy Chief Minister D K Shivakumar said that he doesn't believe in them. "I don't believe in exit polls, let's wait for the voters' verdict," Shivakumar told reporters. Many exit polls released on Wednesday predicted a victory for the BJP, while two exit polls predicted a victory for the AAP. The Congress was projected to make no significant gains from last elections. Shivakumar was among the Congress party's star campaigners in Delhi, announcing 'Pyari Didi Yojana,' promising a monthly financial assistance of Rs 2,500 to women if voted to power in Delhi. The Election Commission will announce the official results on 8 February. *—PTI*

RS 2.62 CR CASH PRIZE

48 startups shortlisted for VentuRISE

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

A total of 48 startups have been selected for the Karnataka government's prestigious VentuRISE 2024-25 Global Startup Challenge, which aims to promote innovative solutions in electronics system design and manufacturing, automotive/EV, and aerospace and defense sectors.

With around 1,000 global applications, the prestigious startup challenge is preparing for the Grand Jury Pitch Round, offering Rs 2.62 crore (USD 3,00,000 in awards and unmatched opportunities for networking with investors, mentors, and corporate leaders at Bengaluru Palace, a state government release said.

The winners will be announced at the Global Investors Meet (GIM) 2025 scheduled from February 11–14, 2025.

Since its inception, VentuRISE has played a pivotal role in identifying, nurturing, and propelling startups toward global recognition. The inaugural edition in 2022 witnessed over 1,200 applications, with past winners like Devic Earth Pvt Ltd and Suzhiyam Industrial Machines setting new benchmarks in sustainability and advanced manufacturing. The 2024-25 edition has attracted approximately 1,000 applications from around the world, reinforcing Karnataka's reputation as a global hub for technology-driven entrepreneurship.

The shortlisted startups, hailing from India, the US, Egypt, and Italy, represent the most promising innovators across the three focus sectors.

Through a meticulous three-round evaluation process, the Steering Committee and an Interim Jury assessed applications based on four criteria - Innovation and Creativity (Novelty and uniqueness of the proposed solutions), Stage of Development (Technical readiness and commercialisation potential), Scalability and Market Potential (Growth trajectory and market fit) and Founding Team's Expertise (Vision, leadership, and execution capabilities). *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Invest K'taka 2025 to host 19 nations, nine pavilions

BENGALURU, 6 FEB

Karnataka's premier global investor meet, Invest Karnataka, will take place from February 12–14, 2025, with an inaugural event on 11 February. The event will feature participation from 19 countries, including France, Japan, and Israel, alongside nine dedicated pavilions showcasing diverse investment opportunities.

Minister for Large and Medium Industries and Infrastructure Development, M B Patil, emphasised the state's commitment to becoming a top investment destination in sectors such as aerospace, renewable energy, and semiconductors. The summit will also highlight the Future of Innovation Expo, focusing on advancements in technology and industry. Notable industry leaders like Anand Mahindra and Kiran Mazumdar-Shaw will share insights during the event. Additionally, Patil is advancing an AI-powered SME Connect Portal and an AI-Powered Single Window System to streamline investment processes. This initiative aims to enhance Karnataka's position in the global innovation ecosystem. *—PTI*

M B Patil *PHOTO: FB*

- This initiative aims to enhance Karnataka's position in the global innovation ecosystem and boost job creation and skill development.

JD(U) leader shot dead in Gaya, three arrested

GAYA, 6 FEB

A local leader of the Janata Dal (United) was shot and killed by armed assailants near his home in Churihara village, Gaya district, on Wednesday night. Mahesh Mishra, who served as the block secretary of JD(U) and deputy mukhiya of the Chiraila panchayat, was attacked by unidentified gunmen. After sustaining multiple gunshot wounds, he was rushed to a nearby government hospital, where he was pronounced dead. Police have detained three suspects based on statements from family members, and a preliminary investigation suggests that a property dispute may have motivated the attack. A formal case has been filed and investigations are ongoing, confirmed Deputy Superintendent of Police Ravi Prakash Singh. *—PTI*

Kerala court denies bail to BJP leader PC George

KOTTAYAM, 6 FEB

A court in Kerala has dismissed the anticipatory bail application of Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) leader P C George in connection with an alleged hate speech case. The Kottayam District Sessions Court rejected George's request following a complaint by Muhamed Shihab, a leader of the Muslim Youth League, which accused him of making remarks that could incite religious animosity. The former MLA reportedly made the controversial statements during a discussion on a television channel, leading to the case being filed by the Erattupetta police. He faces charges under Section 196(1)(a) and Section 299 of the Indian Penal Code, along with Section 120(o) of the Kerala Police Act. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Murmu bats for reform of key multilateral bodies

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

President Droupadi Murmu on Thursday emphasised the need for early and comprehensive reform of key multilateral bodies, including the United Nations Security Council, to make them reflective of contemporary global realities. Welcoming Philemon Yang, the President of the 79th session of the United Nations General Assembly, at the Rashtrapati Bhavan, she said 2025 will see important UN conferences like the Fourth Conference on Financing for Development, and the Third UN Ocean Conference, among others. Murmu assured Yang of India's active and constructive participation in these platforms. She also appreciated Yang's emphasis on science and data-driven approach to sustainable development and his inclusive vision. She also commended his leadership in the adoption of the "Pact for the Future" in September 2024. *—PTI*

Manipur Chief Minister N Biren Singh takes a dip at the Maha Kumbh in Prayagrag, Uttar Pradesh **PHOTO: X**

Opposition protests treatment of deportees

Meanwhile, amid deportee abuse claims, Govt mulls sweeping new overseas migration law

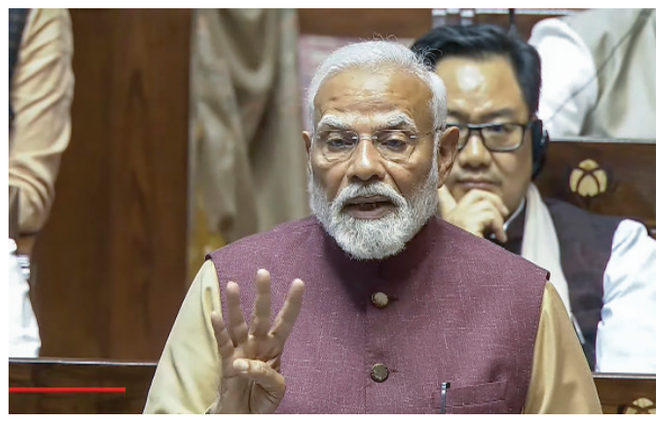
Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge with LoP in Lok Sabha Rahul Gandhi, party MPs Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, Deepender Singh Hooda, SP MP Akhilesh Yadav and others protest in New Delhi on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Opposition MPs have fiercely condemned the Indian government's handling of 104 deported illegal immigrants from the United States, following their arrival on a US military aircraft in Amritsar. This group, the first to be sent back under the Trump administration's crackdown on illegal immigration, reportedly endured inhumane treatment, with many claiming they were handcuffed throughout the journey, only to be unshackled upon landing.

Opposition leaders, including Congress President Mallikarjun Kharge, Rahul Gandhi, Priyanka Gandhi Vadra, and Samajwadi Party head Akhilesh Yadav, staged a protest. Some opposition members donned handcuffs to highlight what they termed an insult to Indian dignity. Holding placards reading "Humans. Not prisoners," they demanded an explanation from Prime Minister Narendra Modi regarding the conditions of the deportees and questioned why Indian authorities did not send a civilian aircraft to facilitate their return. In juxtaposition to the outcry over the deportations, the government is actively considering the introduction of a new law aimed at promoting safe, orderly, and regular migration for overseas employment. The proposed "Overseas Mobility (Facilitation and Welfare) Bill, 2024" is intended to replace the outdated Emigration Act of 1983. A report from the Parliamentary Committee on External Affairs, chaired by Shashi Tharoor, emphasises the need for modernisation in response to contemporary migration dynamics and calls for establishing more Protector of Emigrants offices in states with significant emigration rates.

The committee has stressed the importance of spreading awareness about safe migration and ensuring that departing citizens are well-informed about their rights and the risks associated with illegal migration. The Ministry of External Affairs is expected to consult with various stakeholders as it works towards finalising the new legislation. *—PTI*



Prime Minister Narendra Modi speaks in the Rajya Sabha during the Budget session of Parliament, in New Delhi **PHOTO: PTI**

Govt working for Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas: PM

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

BJP-led Union government is working on the principle of 'Sabka Saath, Sabka Vikas', Prime Minister Narendra Modi said on Thursday as he accused the Congress of practising appeasement politics to get votes.

Replying to the debate on the Motion of Thanks to the President's address in the Rajya Sabha, the prime minister said the Congress' priority was "family first" and its policies had been focused around it.

Modi also accused the Congress of being against the architect of India's Constitution B R Ambedkar, and recalled the Emergency of 1975-77 as well as incidents of alleged suppression of freedom of expression under the earlier regimes of Congress. He said his government has worked for upliftment of the poor, and it stands with the middle class and the "neo-middle class" in the country.

"Nation first is the BJP's priority..." Modi said.

"I say it with a lot of pride... For five to six decades, there was no alternative model for the people. After a long time, after 2014, the country got to witness a new model, which is not based on appeasement but 'santushtikaran' (satisfaction of all)," he said.

"The earlier model, especially under the Congress, was appeasement in everything. This became the crux of its politics. It would give something to small groups and deprive others. At the time of elections, it would give false hope. It ran its politics by fooling people," he said.

Modi said the BJP-led government was focused on optimum utilisation of resources. *—PTI*

OVER

28 LAKH

PUBLIC GRIEVANCES WERE REDRESSED IN 2024

Mobile tariffs down 94% since 2014: Scindia

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Union Communication and IT Minister Jyotiraditya Scindia announced that mobile phone tariffs have decreased by 94% since 2014. With mobile subscribers rising from 90 crore to 116 crore and internet users from 25 crore to 97.44 crore, Scindia highlighted that call costs have dropped to three paise per minute and broadband rates to Rs 9.70 per GB. Concerns were raised by Congress MP Randeep Singh Surjewala regarding recent tariff hikes. *—PTI*

REPLACING 6-DECADE OLD ACT

Cabinet to review new IT bill today

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The forthcoming income tax bill, poised for presentation in Parliament next week, will feature a markedly simplified language, devoid of lengthy sentences, provisos, and convoluted explanations, according to Finance Secretary Tuhin Kanta Pandey.

The proposed legislation, intended to replace the six-decade-old Income Tax Act, is expected to be reviewed at an upcoming Cabinet meeting on Friday, as per sources. Announced by Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during her Budget address, the new bill will also integrate adjustments made to income tax rates, slabs, and TDS provisions set forth in the Budget for 2025-26.

"When you see the new income tax Bill next week, it will be distinctly different. The approach to drafting laws is evolving... You will notice a significant reduction in long sentences, and likely the absence of provisos and explanations," Pandey stated at a PHD Chambers event.

He affirmed that the new bill would not impose any new taxes or burdens on taxpayers, emphasising that the policy would remain largely stable to avoid creating any uncertainty.

Pandey highlighted the bill's goal of simplicity, insisting that legal provisions should be accessible to all citizens, not just legal professionals. Drafted within a six-month timeframe, the new law aims to streamline the language for better clarity and understanding among taxpayers, while also eliminating outdated provisions to create a more concise document. *—PTI*

PHOTO: ANI

- Pandey highlighted the bill's goal of simplicity, insisting that legal provisions should be accessible to all citizens, not just legal professionals

BJP urges removal of 1,000 non-Hindu TTD staff

TIRUPATI, 6 FEB

The Andhra Pradesh BJP has strongly called for the removal of approximately 1,000 employees of the Tirumala Tirupati Devasthanams (TTD) suspected of practising non-Hindu faiths, asserting that Tirumala is the "spiritual capital of Hindus". Bhanu Prakash Reddy, BJP spokesperson and TTD board member, announced plans to meet Chief Minister Chandrababu Naidu on 14 February to discuss the exclusion of non-Hindus from temple services.

TTD employs around 6,500 permanent and over 17,000 contract staff. Reddy cited claims that many employees do not partake in offerings of prasadam from Sri Venkateswara Swamy, which further prompted the party's demand. He noted that the TTD Act stipulates that only Hindus should perform temple rituals. The recent disciplinary action taken by TTD against 18 employees for alleged non-Hindu activities has sparked controversy. Reddy has called for a verification of the religious identities of two of these employees, stating they may be "real" Hindus.

In a related development, YSRCP Chief Jagan Mohan Reddy declined to comment on the TTD's actions, admitting he was unaware of the specifics surrounding the issue or the relevant departments of the employees involved. He emphasised the diversity of TTD's operations, making staff oversight complex.

Jagan also addressed recent exits from his party, highlighting the importance of character in politics and the need for patience amidst challenges. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

- YSRCP Chief Jagan also addressed recent exits from his party, highlighting the importance of character in politics and the need for patience amidst challenges

Deepika Padukone, Sadhguru to join 'Pariksha Pe Charcha'

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The eighth edition of the Prime Minister's annual 'Pariksha Pe Charcha' (PPC) is set to feature a fresh format, with well-known figures such as actor Deepika Padukone, Olympic boxer MC Mary Kom, and spiritual leader Sadhguru joining Prime Minister Narendra Modi to engage with students.

In a departure from the traditional town hall style, Modi recently visited Sunder Nursery with 35 carefully selected students from various states and educational institutions, discussing exam pressures and stress management techniques. *—PTI*

Bengal Biz Summit secures ₹4.4cr investments: Didi

KOLKATA, 6 FEB

Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee said West Bengal received investment proposals valued at over Rs 4.40 lakh crore during the two-day business conclave. She asserted that the state remains a "prime destination" for investors.

"We have received investment proposals worth Rs 4,40,595 crore during this event. This will create thousands of job opportunities in West Bengal," she said.

Addressing the concluding session of the summit, Banerjee revealed that a total of 212 memoranda of understanding and letters of intent were signed across various sectors. Banerjee credited her government's development efforts since 2011, claiming they uplifted 1.72 crore people above the poverty line.

"Our focus on infrastructure, industry, and social welfare has led to significant progress," she added.

A key highlight of this year's summit was the investment commitment from Reliance Industries, with its Chairman Mukesh Ambani pledging to invest Rs 50,000 crore in the state by the end of the decade. She also said the state would be providing land to ONGC in Ashoknagar. "Soon, ONGC will begin commercial oil extraction in Ashoknagar," she said. Other notable announcements included the unveiling of a global centre for artificial intelligence by ITC in Kolkata and JSW Group Chairman Sajjan Jindal announcing Rs 16,000 crore investment to develop a 1,600 MW power project at Salboni, with plans to double the capacity in the future. *—PTI*

HIGHER RANGE, MORE POWER

Defence Ministry inks ₹10K cr Pinaka rocket deal

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The government on Thursday inked contracts worth more than 10,000 crore with defence entities for procurement of Area Denial Munition Type-1 and high-explosive rockets with enhanced range for Pinaka multiple launch rocket system, seeking to enhance Indian Army's firepower capabilities.

The Defence Ministry in a statement also said a contract for upgrade in Shakti software has also been signed with Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL).

The ministry has inked contracts with Economic Explosive Limited (EEL) and Munitions India Limited (MIL) for "procurement of Area Denial Munition (ADM) Type-1 (DPICM) and High Explosive Pre Fragmented (HEPF) Mk-1 (Enhanced) rockets respectively for Pinaka Multiple Launch Rocket System (MLRS) at a total cost of Rs 10,147 crore", it said.

ADM Type-1 of Pinaka MLRS has a specialised warhead to deliver a quantum of sub-munitions over a larger area **PHOTO: PTI**

"HEPF Mk-1 (E) rockets are advance version of in-service HEPF rockets which have enhanced range to strike deep into enemy territory with precision and lethality, the statement said.

The contracts were signed in the presence of Defence Secretary Rajesh Kumar Singh in New Delhi.

ADM Type-1 of Pinaka MLRS has a "specialised warhead" to deliver a quantum of sub-munitions over a larger area targeting mechanised forces, vehicles and personnel, thereby denying specific areas to the enemy, the ministry said.

The procurement of ADM Type-1 (DPICM) and HEPF Mk-1 (E) rockets will mark a "significant milestone" in the modernisation of the artillery rocket regiments, officials said. *—PTI*

RaGa slams govt at protest against draft UGC norms

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi has accused the University Grants Commission (UGC) of pushing draft regulations for teacher appointments that align with the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS) agenda, which he claims aims to impose a singular narrative of "one history, one tradition, one language" across India. Speaking at a protest organised by the DMK, Gandhi asserted that the RSS seeks to erase diverse histories, cultures, and traditions in favour of a monolithic identity.

He emphasised that India's strength lies in its plurality and that each state possesses unique languages, histories, and traditions. Gandhi particularly highlighted the concerns of Tamil people, arguing that the UGC's proposed changes undermine their identity and that of others facing RSS dominance.

"This attempt that it is doing with the education system of different states is just another attempt to push its agenda," Gandhi said.

Samajwadi Party chief Akhilesh Yadav supported Gandhi's stance, alleging the BJP-RSS coalition wishes to centralise power at the expense of state autonomy and democratic values. The Congress party has labelled the draft regulations "draconian and anti-Constitution," demanding an immediate retraction. Meanwhile, a recent conclave of opposition state ministers resolved to oppose the draft regulations, asserting that the principles of federalism and quality education must be upheld against the backdrop of NEP, 2020. *—PTI*

4 boys skip school for tractor ride; 3 killed in crash

DHAMTARI, 6 FEB

In a tragic incident in Chhattisgarh's Dhamtari district, three minor boys were killed and another was injured after a tractor they were riding on overturned. The accident occurred near Charra village on Wednesday, with the victims identified as 16-year-olds Pritam Chandrakar and Mayank Dhruv from Mogra village, and 14-year-old Honendra Sahu from Charra. According to police, the boys took the tractor for a ride after skipping school. Following the accident, which was attributed to the driver losing control, three boys were trapped underneath the vehicle and died at the scene, while a fourth, Arjun Yadav, sustained serious injuries and has been admitted to hospital. *—PTI*

Court acquits trio in 2018 attempted murder case

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

A Delhi court has acquitted three individuals in an attempted murder case from 2018, citing untrustworthy prosecution evidence. Additional Sessions Judge Sachin Sangwan dismissed charges against Rajender Chauhan, Sunil Chauhan, and Babita, stating that eyewitness testimonies were inconsistent and lacked corroboration. The case involved allegations that Nitin was stabbed during a brawl on April 17, 2018. The court found significant discrepancies in witness accounts and noted that the victim did not provide a history of the alleged assault, undermining the prosecution's claims. Furthermore, the investigation was deemed inadequate. *—PTI*

UGC notices to 18 medical colleges over ragging

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The University Grants Commission (UGC) has issued showcause notices to 18 medical colleges for failing to adhere to anti-ragging regulations, officials announced on Thursday.
Among the colleges cited are two each from Delhi, Tamil Nadu, Assam, and Puducherry, three each from Andhra Pradesh and Bihar, and one each from Madhya Pradesh, Telangana, West Bengal, and Uttar Pradesh. UGC Secretary Manish Joshi stated that the institutions did not comply with the stipulations set forth in the Anti-Ragging Regulations, 2009, particularly the requirement to obtain anti-ragging undertakings from students. "This undertaking is vital to prevent and deter ragging incidents within educational institutions.*—PTI*

PHOTO: X

UP starts e-lottery system in new excise policy

LUCKNOW, 6 FEB

The Uttar Pradesh Cabinet, chaired by Chief Minister Yogi Adityanath, approved the Excise Policy for the financial year 2025-26 on 6 February, introducing several significant changes. Notably, the government has implemented an e-lottery system for the allocation of liquor and cannabis (Bhang) shops. For the first time, "Composite Shops" will be introduced, combining beer and foreign liquor outlets into a single unit, allowing consumers to purchase all types of alcoholic beverages from one shop. Excise Minister Nitin Agarwal confirmed that applicants can submit only one application and will be limited to a maximum of two shops across the state. The government has introduced a tiered processing fee structure across five categories based on geographical areas. *—PTI*

Robbed of life's savings, US deportees now in despair

They paid Rs 30L to travel agents, starved for days

HOSHIARPUR, 6 FEB

The repatriation flight has left the deportees grappling with a bleak future **PHOTO: PTI**

A group of 104 illegal Indian immigrants, including 30 from Punjab, returned home handcuffed after a harrowing journey in pursuit of the American Dream, only to discover shattered hopes, massive debts, and betrayal by unscrupulous travel agents.

The repatriation flight, facilitated by the US military, has left the deportees grappling with a bleak future. Among them is Sukhpal Singh, a resident of Darapur village in Hoshiarpur, who left his job as a chef in Italy with aspirations of a better life in the United States. He shared with PTI the details of his ill-fated journey, highlighting the perilous circumstances orchestrated by a deceitful travel agent who charged Rs 30 lakh for what he promised would be a safe passage to the US.

Sukhpal revealed that instead of being flown directly to the US, he and fellow travellers were transported to Nicaragua, where their passports were seized upon arrival. This commenced a treacherous journey that involved traversing through Honduras, Guatemala, and Mexico, culminating in a harrowing 12-hour boat ride to the Californian border. Tragically, one of his companions drowned during the ordeal.

Hiding his plans from his family, Sukhpal had hoped to surprise them. However, he was apprehended by US border authorities and subjected to a 12-day detention, during which he experienced inadequate treatment, poor food options, and a lack of access to legal counsel.

Upon their return to India, deportees such as Jaspal Singh from Gurdaspur recounted similar tales of deception. Jaspal had paid Rs 40 lakh to the same travel agent, believing he would obtain a proper visa. Instead, he found himself trapped in an illegal crossing at the US-Mexico border.

Pardeep Singh, 22, from Lalru in Amritsar, endured a six-month journey before being apprehended upon arrival in the US. His parents took out a loan of Rs 41 lakh for his journey, leaving them in financial uncertainty following his deportation. Recounting the horror faced by 27-year-old Robin Handa, his father Manjit Singh said his son travelled across Guyana, Brazil, Peru, Colombia, Ecuador and Guatemala, crossed a sea and passed through jungles, staying hungry for days, to reach the Mexico-US border. Handa, who studied till class 12, left his native Ismailabad village in Kurukshetra district on 18 July last year and by the time he reached the US border, he had paid Rs 45 lakh to different agents while his mobile phone was also snatched, his father claimed. He was handed over to the "immigration mafia" in Mexico and they tortured him for money. *—PTI*

'PHONE SEIZURE OPPRESSION'

Fear of surveillance is assault on press, rules Madras HC

CHENNAI, 6 FEB

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Madras High Court has observed that press freedom and privacy were allies and that the fear of surveillance is an assault on the media, which is the fourth pillar of democracy.

Justice G K Ilanthiraiyan issued the ruling while disposing of petitions filed by the Chennai Press Club and three reporters, who sought to prevent the Special Investigation Team (SIT) from harassing them during an investigation into the leak of an FIR related to a sexual assault case at Anna University.

The judge condemned the SIT for seizing the petitioners' mobile phones and attempting to access their personal data under the guise of investigation. Justice Ilanthiraiyan emphasised that the seizure violated Section 15(2) of the Press Council Act, which protects journalists' sources as privileged communication. He noted that the petitioners had neither uploaded the FIR nor shared it on social media, making the phone seizures unnecessary and unlawful.

The court also pointed out the failure of the SIT to investigate those directly responsible for uploading the FIR or to issue summons to them, instead focusing solely on the journalists. Justice Ilanthiraiyan highlighted that the police had claimed technical glitches caused the FIR to be uploaded, but this did not absolve them of responsibility. The judge further criticised the uploading of the FIR, noting that the Supreme Court's guidelines prohibit public access to FIRs in sensitive cases, such as those involving sexual offences.

While acknowledging the SIT's right to summon the journalists for questioning, the court stressed that the investigators must not harass them or ask irrelevant questions. The judge directed the SIT to complete its inquiry by 10 February and return the seized devices to the petitioners without delay. Furthermore, the SIT was forbidden from probing into the petitioners' personal details, including their friends, relatives, or confidential sources. *—PTI*

Chandrayaan-4 to launch in 2027, says Jitendra Singh

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

India will launch the Chandrayaan-4 mission to bring back samples of moon rocks to the Earth in 2027, Science and Technology Minister Jitendra Singh said.

Chandrayaan-4 will involve at least two separate launches of the heavylift LVM-3 rocket that will carry five different components of the mission which will be assembled in orbit.

The minister said the Gaganyaan mission, which involves sending Indian astronauts in a specially designed spacecraft to low-earth orbit and bringing them back safely, will be launched next year.

In 2026, India will also launch Samudrayaan, which will take three scientists in a submersible up to a depth of 6,000 metres in the deep ocean, to explore the seabed.

The minister underscored the potential of the Samudrayaan to unlock vast resources, including critical minerals, rare metals, and undiscovered marine biodiversity, all of which are crucial for the country's economic growth and environmental sustainability.

The first uncrewed mission of the Gaganyaan project carrying a robot, 'Vyommitra', will also take place this year.

Singh said that while the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) was established in 1969, it took more than two decades to set up the first launch pad in 1993. "We are now building a third launch pad and for the first time for heavier rockets, and expanding also beyond Sriharikota with a new launch site in Tamil Nadu's Tuticorin district to launch small satellites," Singh said. *—PTI*

IAF JET CRASHES

A Mirage-2000 fighter jet of the Indian Air Force crashed in an agriculture field in Madhya Pradesh's Shivpuri on Thursday after encountering a system malfunction. Both pilots ejected safely but suffered minor injuries **PHOTO: PTI**

Asaram docu: 'Discovery' gets threat

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Supreme Court on Thursday granted interim protection to the officials of Discovery Communications India who are allegedly facing threats after the release of the documentary series 'Cult of Fear: Asaram Bapu'.

The order of the top court came on a petition filed by Discovery Communications India and its senior staff based in different states across India.

A bench of Chief Justice of India Sanjiv Khanna and Justices PV Sanjay Kumar and KV Viswanathan ordered police authorities of Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, Haryana, Telangana and Tamil Nadu to ensure the protection of officials and properties of the broadcasting channel.

The channel which released the documentary on self-styled godman Asaram Baapu said several hate comments against Discovery and persons associated with it were received on the social media accounts of the Broadcasters.

The bench observed that it may not be possible for the petitioners to approach different High Courts where their staff may be posted and issued notice to the Central government and the authorities in Karnataka, Maharashtra, West Bengal, Delhi, Haryana, Telangana and Tamil Nadu.

The petitioners claimed that the documentary on Asaram Bapu was made based on public records, court orders and witness testimonies. After the documentary was released on the OTT platform Discovery +, the petitioners claimed to have received threats. *—PTI*

SC adjourns bail pleas of 2 in Elgar case

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The Supreme Court has adjourned the hearing on the bail applications of advocate Surendra Gadling and activist Jyoti Jagtap, both implicated in the Elgar Parishad-Maoist links case. A bench comprising Justices MM. Sundresh and Rajesh Bindal also deferred deliberations on a petition by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) contesting the bail granted to activist Mahesh Raut by the Bombay High Court.

Senior advocate Anand Grover, representing Gadling, rebutted claims of trial delays and requested time to present necessary records.

Meanwhile, senior advocate Mihir Desai, representing Jagtap and Raut, urged the court to expedite the hearings. Additional Solicitor General SV Raju, representing the NIA, described the high court's bail decision for Raut as "absolutely perverse."

Gadling faces accusations of aiding Maoists and conspiring with co-accused, allegedly providing sensitive information and maps to underground rebels. Jagtap, identified as a member of the Kabir Kala Manch (KKM), was involved in delivering provocative speeches at the 2017 Elgar Parishad conclave in Pune, purportedly inciting violence. *—PTI*

Woman moves HC against death row for murder

KOCHI, 6 FEB

Kerala High Court on Thursday called for the records in the conviction and death sentence given to a 24-year-old woman for the sensational murder of her boyfriend in 2022.

A bench of Justices PB Suresh Kumar and Jobin Sebastian asked the state to indicate its stand on the appeal moved by Greeshma and her uncle, challenging their conviction and punishment.

They have also sought suspension of their sentence.

The High Court suspended the sentence of the uncle -- Nirmala Kumaran Nair -- who was given a three-year jail term for destruction of evidence and is at present out on bail. *—PTI*

ISOLATION HITS LIVELIHOOD

J&K villagers protest amid mysterious illness

RAJOURI, 6 FEB

Villagers from Badhaal, a remote hamlet in Jammu and Kashmir's Rajouri district, protested on Thursday demanding to return home following the unexplained deaths of 17 residents attributed to a mysterious illness. The villagers have been housed in isolation facilities for the past 12 days, but authorities have yet to determine the cause of the fatalities.

During the protest, the villagers expressed concerns about their abandoned livestock and property, noting that their animals are suffering from neglect and are on the brink of death. In response to the unrest, senior administrative officers arrived at the scene to engage in discussions with the protesters.

The residents were relocated out of precaution after suspicions arose regarding a neurotoxin contaminating the local food chain **PHOTO: PTI**

The residents were relocated out of precaution after suspicions arose regarding a neurotoxin contaminating the local food chain. Three isolation facilities have been established at the district headquarters in Rajouri. Meanwhile, authorities conducted surprise inspections of pesticide and fertiliser stores, leading to their closure until further notice.

Eleven individuals who had been treated at the Government Medical College (GMC) Hospital for the mysterious illness have now fully recovered and were discharged on Monday. A five-member team from the All India Institute of Medical Sciences (AIIMS) in New Delhi recently completed a three-day assessment in Badhaal, interviewing patients and collecting samples for further investigation. Currently, containment measures remain in place, with 79 families still in isolation. Eight teams of government officials are overseeing the care of over 700 livestock, ensuring their access to food, water, and medical attention. The village has been divided into clusters, each monitored by 182 officials to protect the remaining households. *—PTI*

Pune seals 19 RO water plants amid GBS outbreak

PUNE, 6 FEB

The Pune Municipal Corporation (PMC) has sealed 19 private reverse osmosis (RO) plants in Nanded village, the centre of a Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS) outbreak, after tests revealed that their water was unfit for human consumption.

Four new suspected GBS cases were reported in Pune district on Wednesday, bringing Maharashtra's total to 170.

These now-sealed RO plants, situated in the Dhayari-Nanded area, were supplying bottled water to a large local population. Following the closure of these facilities, the PMC's water supply department plans to establish standard operating procedures (SOPs) to prevent future distribution of contaminated water.

PMC's additional commissioner, Prithviraj PB, noted that water samples from these plants contained harmful Escherichia coli bacteria. In response to this finding, private water suppliers have been instructed to use a bleaching powder solution provided by the PMC to eliminate the bacteria.

Members of a rapid response team investigating the GBS outbreak found that the drinking water supplied to the households of 26 suspected patients lacked chlorine, raising further concerns about water safety. GBS is characterised by sudden numbness and muscle weakness, with symptoms including severe limb weakness. *—PTI*

2,900 killed as rebels take over DR Congo city

The Office of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court called for the presentation of information and evidence regarding atrocities committed in eastern Congo, where at least 2,900 people were killed in violence since the Rwanda-backed M23 rebel movement seized the eastern city of Goma last week.

"The Office will continue to investigate alleged crimes committed by any person, irrespective of affiliation or nationality and will not be limited to particular individuals, parties or members of specific groups," the prosecutor's offfice said in a statement.

As Goma counted its dead, Vivian van de Perre, deputy chief of the UN peacekeeping mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUSCO), gave an updated toll from the battle for the city.

"So far, 2,000 bodies have been collected from the Goma streets in recent days, and 900 bodies remain in the morgues of the Goma hospitals," she told a video news conference, saying the toll could still rise.

Despite announcing a unilateral ceasefire on Monday, the rebels mounted a fresh offensive gained ground in eastern Congo on Wednesday despite the unilateral ceasefire they declared earlier this week, taking control of a town 100 kilometers (60 miles) from the provincial capital of Bukavu, civil society officials and residents told The Associated Press.

Citing pleas for the safe passage of aid and hundreds of thousands of displaced people, the M23 announced the ceasefire, but Congo's government has described the ceasefire as "false communication," and the United Nations has noted reports of heavy fighting with Congolese forces in the mineral-rich region.

The new offensive came days before the Rwandan and Congolese presidents are due to attend a crisis summit.

Intense clashes broke out at dawn on Wednesday as M23 fighters and Rwandan forces seized the mining town of Nyabibwe, about 100 kilometers (60 miles) from Bukavu and 70 kilometers from the province's airport, security and humanitarian sources told AFP. The M23, declaring ceasefire, said that it had "no intention of taking control of Bukavu or other localities."

"This is proof that the unilateral ceasefire that has been declared was, as usual, a ploy," Congolese government spokesman Patrick Muyaya told AFP.

In more than three years of fighting between the Rwanda-backed group and the Congolese army, half a dozen ceasefires and truces have been declared, before being unceremoniously broken.

Local and military sources said in recent days that all sides were reinforcing troops and equipment in the region.

Last week's capture of Goma was a major escalation in the mineral-rich region, scarred by relentless conflict involving dozens of armed groups over three decades.

In Bukavu, a city of one million people that residents fear will become the next battleground, a crowd gathered for an ecumenical prayer service for peace, organized by local women.

"We are tired of the non-stop wars. We want peace," one attendee, Jacqueline Ngengele, told AFP.

DRC President Felix Tshisekedi and his Rwandan counterpart Paul Kagame are due to attend a joint summit of the eight-country East African Community and 16-member Southern African Development Community in the Tanzanian city of Dar es Salaam on Saturday. Diplomatic sources say the M23's advance in the east of the vast central African nation could weaken Tshisekedi, who won a second term in December 2023.

Fears the violence could spark a wider conflict have galvanized regional bodies, mediators such as Angola and Kenya, as well as the United Nations, European Union and other countries in diplomatic efforts for a peaceful resolution.

But the DRC's top diplomat accused the international community of being all talk and no action on the conflict.

"We see a lot of declarations but we don't see actions," Foreign Minister Therese Kayikwamba Wagner told journalists in Brussels.

Several neighboring countries have already said they are bolstering their defenses, wary of the crisis spilling over. A UN expert report said last year that Rwanda had up to 4,000 troops in the DRC, seeking to profit from its vast mineral wealth, and that Kigali has "de facto" control over the M23.

The eastern DRC has deposits of coltan, a metallic ore that is vital in making phones and laptops, as well as gold and other minerals.

Rwanda never explicitly admitted to military involvement in support of the M23 and alleges that the DRC supports the FDLR, an armed group created by ethnic Hutus who massacred Tutsis during the 1994 Rwandan genocide. —*Arab News*

Children queue to fetch water as schools remain closed after the conflict erupted in Goma **PHOTO: EPA**

HUNDREDS OF WOMEN RAPED, BURNT ALIVE AFTER JAILBREAK

Hundreds of Congolese women were raped and burnt alive after Rwandan-backed militants raided a prison. The female inmates were attacked in their wing inside Goma's Munzenze prison during a mass jailbreak, UN peacekeeping chief Vivian van de Perre said.

Tens of thousands of residents in eastern Congo's largest city, Goma, fled their homes after the M23 rebels made swift gains in the North Kivu province bordering Rwanda. As several thousand men managed to escape from the prison during the fighting, the area reserved for women was set on fire, Ms van de Perre said.

"There was a major prison breakout of 4,000 escaped prisoners. A few hundred women were also in that prison. They were all raped and then they set fire to the women's wing. They all died afterwards," Ms van de Perre told The Guardian.

This week the UN office of the high commissioner for human rights (OHCHR) warned that sexual violence was being used as a weapon of war by rival armed groups in Goma. The city, home to more than one million people, is under the total control of M23 forces. But in an unforeseen development late on Monday, the militia announced a unilateral "ceasefire".

— Courtesy, The Independent

SALAR

January 2025 was the hottest on record

Last month was the hottest January on record, Europe's climate monitor said Thursday, despite expectations that cooler La Nina conditions might quell a streak of record-breaking global temperatures.

The Copernicus Climate Change Service said January was 1.75C hotter than pre-industrial times, extending a persistent run of history-making highs over 2023 and 2024, as human-caused greenhouse gas emissions crank up the global thermostat.

Climate scientists had expected this exceptional spell to subside after a warming El Nino event peaked in January 2024 and conditions gradually shifted to an opposing, cooling La Nina phase.

But the heat has lingered at record or near record levels ever since, sparking debate among scientists about what other factors could be driving heating to the top end of expectations.

"This is what makes it a bit of a surprise... you're not seeing this cooling effect, or temporary brake at least, on the global temperature that we were expecting to see," Julien Nicolas, a climate scientist from Copernicus, told AFP.

La Nina is expected to be weak and Copernicus said prevailing temperatures in parts of the equatorial Pacific Ocean suggested "a slowing or stalling of the move toward" the cooling phenomenon.

Nicolas said it could disappear completely by March.

Clear sign the limit was being tested

Last month, Copernicus said that global temperatures averaged across 2023 and 2024 had exceeded 1.5 degrees Celsius for the first time.

This did not represent a permanent breach of the long-term 1.5C warming target under the Paris climate accord — but a clear sign that the limit was being tested.

Scientists warn that every fraction of a degree of warming above 1.5C increases the intensity and frequency of extreme weather events like heatwaves, heavy rainfall and droughts.

Copernicus said Arctic sea ice in January hit a monthly record low, virtually tied with 2018. Analysis from the US this week put it at the second-lowest in that dataset.

Overall, 2025, is not expected to follow 2023 and 2024 into the history books: scientists predict it will rank the third hottest year yet.

Copernicus said it would be closely monitoring ocean temperatures throughout 2025 for hints about how the climate might behave.

Oceans are a vital climate regulator and carbon sink, and cooler waters can absorb greater amounts of heat from the atmosphere, helping to lower air temperatures.

They also store 90 percent of the excess heat trapped by humanity's release of greenhouse gases.

"This heat is bound to resurface periodically," said Nicolas.

"I think that's also one of the questions — is this what has been happening over the past couple of years?"

Sea surface temperatures have been exceptionally warm over 2023 and 2024, and Copernicus said readings in January were the second highest on record.

"That is the thing that is a little puzzling — why they remain so warm," Nicolas said.

The culprit: burning fossil fuels

Scientists are unanimous that burning fossil fuels has largely driven long-term global warming, and that natural climate variability can also influence temperatures one year to the next.

But natural warming cycles like El Nino could not alone explain what had taken place in the atmosphere and seas, and answers were being sought elsewhere.

One theory is that a global shift to cleaner shipping fuels in 2020 accelerated warming by reducing sulfur emissions that make clouds more mirror-like and reflective of sunlight.

In December, another peer-reviewed paper looked at whether a reduction in low-lying clouds had let more heat reach Earth's surface.

"It's really still a matter of debate," said Nicolas.

The EU monitor uses billions of measurements from satellites, ships, aircraft and weather stations to aid its climate calculations.

Its records go back to 1940, but other sources of climate data — such as ice cores, tree rings and coral skeletons — allow scientists to expand their conclusions using evidence from much further in the past.

Scientists say the period being lived through right now is likely the warmest the Earth has been for the last 125,000 year. —*Arab News*

Scientists are unanimous that burning fossil fuels has driven long-term global warming **PHOTO: PTI**

LETTERS write to us at salarenglishdigital@gmail.com

Safety concerns rise with more Indian students dying abroad

In December alone, three Indian students were killed in separate incidents across Canada, prompting concerns about safety and rising violence.

Gurasis Singh, a 22-year-old postgraduate student from Punjab, was stabbed to death by his roommate in Ontario, just four months after he arrived in Canada for his studies.

A few days later, student Rittika Rajput was killed when a tree fell on her during a late-night bonfire in Kelowna, British Columbia. The Royal Canadian Mounted Police reported it as a "non-suspicious" incident.

On 6 December, Harshandeep Singh, 20, was shot and killed by a gang in Edmonton. As a student, he worked as a security guard. Two suspects were arrested and charged with first-degree murder in connection with his death.

In response, the Indian government has issued safety advisories for students to exercise "extreme caution."

Indian Foreign Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar said that Indian embassies and consulates are actively monitoring these incidents and maintaining communication with students to inform them about safety measures, particularly regarding dangerous areas in cities.

More Indians studying abroad than Chinese

Indian students currently represent the largest cohort studying abroad, surpassing other nationalities for the first time in over a decade.

As of 2024, around 1.33 million Indian students are pursuing higher education internationally, followed by over 1 million Chinese students, according to government data.

According to the US State Department, over 330,000 Indian students studied at various US higher education institutions in 2024.

Canada has the highest number of Indian students, coming in at over 400,000 in 2024, according to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs.

"With over 400,000 Indian students enrolled in Canadian universities, most are using the student route as a pathway to immigration. A significant percentage end up in sub-par institutions and struggle to make ends meet, working long hours to pay their tuition," said Ajay Bisaria, a former envoy to Canada.

"These students often face serious issues, including hate crimes, mental health problems and maladjustment. They are also vulnerable to exploitation by unscrupulous agents who promise them a smooth transition to Canadian residency," added Bisaria.

Indian students currently represent the largest cohort studying abroad, surpassing other nationalities for the first time in over a decade **PHOTO: X**

Ravinder Singh, an Indian student in Toronto, told DW that many students are vulnerable to targeted crime if they rent accommodation in poorer areas.

"Sometimes, students are just in the wrong place and at the wrong time and that is when they get hurt," Singh said.

Calls for more safety

Former Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Shringla told DW that with a rising number of Indian students studying around the world, host countries should "provide them with a safe and secure environment."

- According to the US State Department, over 330,000 Indian students studied at various US higher education institutions in 2024.Canada has the highest number of Indian students, coming in at over 400,000 in 2024, according to the Indian Ministry of External Affairs. In the past five years, at least 633 Indian students have died abroad across 41 countries, including the highest of 172 in Canada.

In the past five years, at least 633 Indian students have died abroad across 41 countries, including the highest of 172 in Canada, followed by the US with 108 deaths encompassing a range of causes, the Indian Foreign Ministry said.

Shringla said host countries need to "ensure that local communities hosting large numbers of students are adequately sensitized to prevent racism and violence against them."

"There can be no justification for such violence perpetrated against harmless young students," added Shringla.

The US-based Foundation for India and Indian Diaspora Studies (FIIDS) published an analysis in April 2024, addressing the cause of deaths among Indian students abroad.

It found that incidents ranged from suspicious shootings, kidnappings, environmental deaths due to lack of safety knowledge, suspicious accidents, and violent crimes.

"The recent increase in their deaths is concerning and, if not addressed, could impact their confidence in the safety of US universities, potentially impacting the inflow of students further," said Khanderao Kand, FIIDS chief of policies and strategy.

Amitabh Mattoo, dean of international studies at Delhi's Jawaharlal Nehru University told DW that more protective measures and support are needed from both host governments and Indian authorities to ensure the safety of students studying abroad.

"There must be sensitivity, security and strengthening of systems for students studying abroad. This proactive approach is important to feel supported and safe while pursuing education,"Mattoo said. —*DW News*

Mob razes B'desh founding father's house

Protesters also demolished houses of a few Awami League leaders after Hasina's online address

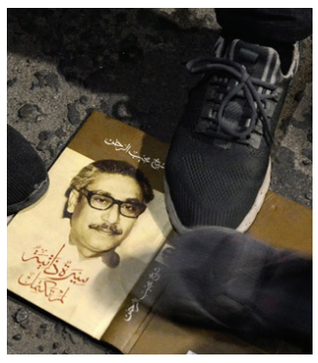
Protesters use heavy machinery to demolish the residence of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman at Dhanmondi in Dhaka on Thursday **PHOTO: PTI**

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Protesters in Bangladesh on Thursday resumed the demolition of the country's founding father Sheikh Mujibur Rahman's house after vandalising and setting it on fire last night. Rahman is also the father of deposed Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina.

The violent demonstrators also demolished the houses of a few Awami League leaders and defaced murals of Rahman after Hasina's live online address from Delhi.

Several thousand people rallied on Wednesday in front of Hasina's father Mujibur Rahman's house in the capital's Dhanmondi area, which had earlier been turned into a memorial museum. The rally followed a social media call for a "Bulldozer Procession" as Hasina was supposed to deliver her address.



Later, an excavator started demolishing the residence. On Thursday morning, the demolition was still underway, using heavy machines.

The residence of Hasina, Sudha Sadan, located on Road 5 in Dhanmondi, was also set on fire by protesters late on Wednesday, The Daily Star newspaper reported.

> **They can demolish a building, but not the history... but they must also remember that the history takes its revenge**
>
> —Sheikh Hasina, Bangladesh ex-PM

Since the ousting of the Hasina-led government on August 5, Sudha Sadan had been completely vacated.

The demonstrators overnight also set on fire the deceased nuclear scientist Wajed Mian's house in the Dhanmondi area, which was used as Hasina's political office.

The actions in Dhaka fuelled similar destructions in other parts of Bangladesh.

Protesters also demolished the Khulna home of Hasina's cousins Sheikh Helal Uddin and Sheikh Salauddin Jewel.

Thousands of people gathered around the house, chanting "Delhi or Dhaka – Dhaka, Dhaka" and "Down with Mujibism".

Ahsan Habib, additional deputy commissioner of Khulna Metropolitan Police, told The Daily Star, "I have seen the news of the incident on Facebook, but I don't have further information."

Sheikh Helal was the former MP of Bagerhat-1 and Sheikh Salahuddin Jewel was the former MP of Khulna-2.

Protesting students also removed the name of Sheikh Mujibur Rahman from Bangabandhu Sheikh Mujibur Rahman Hall of Dhaka University.

The homes of former lawmaker of Kushtia-3 and Awami League Joint General Secretary Mahbubul Alam Hanif and president of Kushtia Awami League Sadar Khan were also ransacked. *—PTI*

Iran launches its first drone-carrier warship

TEHRAN, 6 FEB

Iran has inaugurated its first drone-carrier warship, saying the vessel is capable of operating in oceans far from its mainland, the official IRNA news agency reported on Thursday. The report said the vessel, manned by the paramilitary Revolutionary Guard's navy, can carry several squadrons of drones as well as helicopters and cruise missiles. Named Shahid Bagheri, it is also capable of launching cruise missiles, IRNA said. With a 180-meter runway for drones, the vessel can travel up to 22,000 nautical miles without refuelling. The report said it was converted from a commercial ship and would increase Iran's power of deterrence. Footage broadcast by state TV on the inauguration showed at least four helicopters and three drones on the warship's runway. *—PTI*

US alerts travellers to Uganda about Ebola outbreak

NEW YORK, 6 FEB

Health officials in the US on Wednesday urged Americans travelling to Uganda to take precautions because of an Ebola outbreak. The officials also said they are helping Ugandan health officials respond to the threat. The travel alert issued by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention does not call on travellers to steer clear of Uganda, but it does urge enhanced precautions, such as avoiding people with symptoms and skipping visits to health care centres unless travellers have an urgent medical need. Ugandan health officials last week reported that a nurse at a hospital in the capital, Kampala, died of Ebola. It was the first recorded fatality since the country's last outbreak of the disease ended in early 2023. *—PTI*

Fire breaks out at school in Nigeria, 17 children killed

ABUJA, 6 FEB

At least 17 children were killed in a fire that broke out in an Islamic school in northwestern Nigeria, the country's National Emergency Management Agency said, as authorities launched an investigation into the cause on Thursday. About 100 children were at the school when the fire broke out on Wednesday in the Kaura Namoda district of Zamfara state, the agency said. Seventeen children were seriously injured and were being treated at different hospitals, it said. The cause of the fire was not immediately clear. Preliminary findings, however, suggest that it started at a stockpile of sticks used for oral hygiene, locally known as "kara", in the vicinity of the school, the agency said. President Bola Tinubu condoled the deaths and urged schools to prioritise children's safety. *—PTI*

PHOTO: WIKIPEDIA

Texas man sues Blake Lively for defamation

LOS ANGELES, 6 FEB

A Texas crisis communications specialist has sued Blake Lively for defamation after the actor pulled him into her legal fight with co-star and director Justin Baldoni over their film 'It Ends With Us'. Jed Wallace and his company, Street Relations, filed the USD 7M lawsuit in federal court in Texas on Tuesday. It says he had nothing to do with any campaign to harm Lively's reputation as she alleged in a lawsuit. Wallace is not among the defendants in Lively's federal lawsuit against Baldoni, his production company and publicists, in which she alleges sexual and other harassment during the production and a campaign to smear her after it. Wallace is named in the lawsuit and a New York Times story published in December. *—PTI*

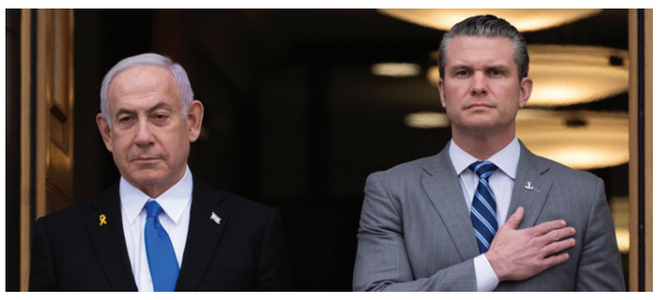
After US, Israel to boycott UNHRC

JERUSALEM, 6 FEB

A day after US President Donald Trump announced America's withdrawal from the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC), Israel's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Gideon Sa'ar, said on Wednesday that Israel would also join the US in its decision not to participate in the UNHRC.

Sa'ar expressed Israel's support for Trump's decision, calling it a step in the right direction. In a post on X on Wednesday, Israeli Foreign Minister said, "Israel welcomes President Trump's decision not to participate in the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC). Israel joins the United States and will not participate in the UNHRC."

He called the UNHRC to have "traditionally protected human rights abusers by allowing them to hide from scrutiny, and instead obsessively demonizes the one democracy in the Middle East - Israel. This body has focused on attacking a democratic country and propagating antisemitism, instead of promoting human rights."



US Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth (R) welcomes Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Nethanyahu to the Pentagon during a ceremony **PHOTO: PTI**

On Trump's call for "permanently" resettling Palestinians from war-torn Gaza, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has said he strongly rejects the proposal for the US to take over Gaza and resettle the 2.1M Palestinians living there. *—Agencies*

Israeli army to plan exit of Palestinians

JERUSALEM, 6 FEB

Israel's defence minister said he has instructed the army to prepare plans for large numbers of Palestinians to leave the Gaza Strip in line with President Donald Trump's proposal for the war-ravaged territory. He said the plan "will include options for exit at land crossings and by sea and air". *—PTI*

Trump's tariffs: China goes to the WTO

Beijing struck back at US tariffs with levies on US goods and by filing a complaint to the World Trade Organization (WTO), invoking its dispute settlement procedure. "The US's unilateral imposition of tariffs seriously violates the rules of the World Trade Organization," said the finance ministry. *—Politico*

WAVE AGAINST TRUMP

People rally outside the California State Capitol (L) and in front of the Nevada Capitol Building in Carson City against Trump administration's deportation of migrants **PHOTOS: PTI**

File photo of firefighters clearing the rubble and searching for victims following a Russian rocket attack in Poltava, Ukraine **PHOTO: PTI**

Ukraine seeks help for post-war rebuilding

KYIV, 6 FEB

Ukraine wants to collaborate with partner countries on postwar projects worth billions of dollars not just in mining rare earth elements, but also in energy and construction sectors to help rebuild the country, Ukrainian Foreign Minister Andrii Sybiha said Wednesday.

Sybiha responded to comments by President Donald Trump who said Monday that he wanted to gain access to Ukraine's valuable rare earth materials as a condition for continuing support for its war against Russia.

Ukrainian officials have said Russia wants to get its hands on Ukraine's vast natural resources.

Kyiv intends to offer "guarantees of the presence of major businesses in Ukraine and the vested interests of our closest allies – the US – in developing these (rare earth) deposits and ensuring their protection," the foreign minister said.

But cooperation should not be limited to rare earth materials, Sybiha said in a news conference alongside visiting U.K. Foreign Secretary David Lammy.

Ukraine has "huge potential" to become a guarantor of energy security in Europe by buying liquefied natural gas from the United States and storing it in its massive underground tanks for later distribution, he said. Sybiha also said there was "joint interest" from Ukrainian and American businesses in the postwar reconstruction of Ukraine, estimated to cost more than USD 400B. *—PTI*

Mexico deploys 10k troopers near US border

US Defense Secretary Hegseth listens to a briefing by a soldier at the Mexican border **PHOTO: PTI**

CIUDAD JUAREZ, 6 FEB

A line of Mexican National Guard and Army trucks rumbled along the border separating Ciudad Juárez and El Paso, Texas on Wednesday, among the first of 10,000 troops Mexico has sent to its northern frontier following tariff threats by President Donald Trump.

Masked and armed National Guard members picked through brush running along the border barrier on the outskirts of Ciudad Juárez, pulling out makeshift ladders and ropes tucked away in the trenches, and pulling them onto trucks.

Patrols were also seen on other parts of the border near Tijuana.

It comes after a turbulent week along the border after Trump announced he would delay imposing crippling tariffs on Mexico for at least a month. In exchange, Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum promised she would send the country's National Guard to reinforce the border and crack down on fentanyl smuggling.

Trump has declared an emergency on the border despite migration levels and fentanyl overdoses significantly dipping over the past year.

The US said it would do more to stop American guns from being trafficked into Mexico to fuel cartel violence, which has rippled to other parts of the country as criminal groups fight to control the lucrative migrant smuggling industry. *—PTI*

BALTIC NATIONS TO CUT RUSSIAN POWER

VILNIUS, 6 FEB

Nearly 3 1/2 decades after leaving the Soviet Union, the Baltic countries of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania this weekend will flip a switch to end electricity-grid connections to neighbouring Russia and Belarus – and turn to their European Union allies.

The severing of electricity ties to Russia is steeped in geopolitical and symbolic significance. Work toward it sped up after Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered his troops to invade Ukraine, battering Moscow's EU relations.

"This is physical disconnection from the last remaining element of our reliance on the Russian and Belarusian energy system," Lithuanian President Gitanas Nauseda told The Associated Press in a recent interview.

EU chief Ursula von der Leyen and other dignitaries are expected at a ceremony on Sunday to witness the final seconds of the electricity ties with Russia. *—PTI*

AL-HUSSAINI NAMED NEW AGA KHAN

LISBON, 6 FEB

Rahim Al-Hussaini was named Wednesday as the new Aga Khan, spiritual leader of the world's millions of Ismaili Muslims, following the death of his father.

The 53-year-old was designated as the Aga Khan V, the 50th hereditary imam of the Ismaili Muslims, in his father's will. His father died Tuesday in Portugal.

The Aga Khan is considered by his followers to be a direct descendant of the Prophet Muhammad and is treated as a head of state.

The Aga Khan Development Network and the Ismaili religious community announced earlier that His Highness Prince Karim Al-Hussaini, the Aga Khan IV and 49th hereditary imam of the Shiite Ismaili Muslims, died surrounded by his family. *—PTI*

MILITANTS KILL 3 POLICEMEN IN PAK

PESHAWAR, 6 FEB

A group of militants armed with assault rifles attacked a police post in restive northwestern Pakistan before dawn on Thursday, killing three officers and wounding five before fleeing the scene, police said.

The attack occurred in Karak, a district in the northwestern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province bordering Afghanistan, local police official Abbas Khan said. He said officers also returned fire after coming under the attack.

No one immediately claimed responsibility for the attack.

In a statement, Pakistan's Interior Minister Mohsin Naqvi condemned the attack and offered his condolences to the families of the slain officers. He blamed the Pakistani Taliban for the attack. *—PTI*

'MORALITY CHECKS'

Hamas killed 'gay' terrorists: Report

TEHRAN, 6 FEB

According to reports recovered by the Israel Defence Forces and shared with The New York Post, Hamas tortured and executed terrorists within its ranks who were allegedly homosexuals. The reports said some male Israeli victims of the 7 October massacre were raped in captivity.

Hamas had a running list of recruits who were found to have failed Hamas' "morality checks" by having same-sex relations — and they paid a heavy price, according to documents recovered by the Israel Defence Forces and shared with The Post.

The reports disclose the "crimes" that were allegedly committed by 94 Hamas recruits — lumping "homosexual conversations," "flirting with girls without a legal relationship" and "sodomy" in with serious allegations of child rape and torture.

The allegations, are dated between 2012 and 2019, involve recruits to Hamas' intelligence, military and interior ministry and say the new members were eventually deemed "unacceptable" to continue working with the terror group because of their actions.

Hamas tortured and executed terrorists within its ranks who allegedly had gay sex, shocking documents have revealed **PHOTO: X**

One of the allegations reportedly mentioned: "He (one of the Hamas members) constantly curses God".

Another said, "He has romantic relationships on Facebook...He is behaviourally and morally deviant".

Homosexuality is illegal in Gaza and can result in years of prison or death.

Mahmoud Ishtiwi, a former Hamas commander, was executed in 2016 for allegedly having same-sex relations. He was shot by three bullets to his chest, almost a year after the Hamas imprisoned and tortured him by hanging the former commander by his limbs, the report said. *—Agencies*

Iranian woman strips in public to protest hijab laws

TEHRAN, 6 FEB

A viral video shows an Iranian woman removing her clothes and climbing naked onto a police vehicle, protesting the Islamic Republic's stricter penalties for women who do not fully cover themselves.

The video shows the woman shouting at armed officers whilst standing on their vehicle's bonnet in Mashhad.

The video, shared by Iranian journalist Masih Alinejad, shows her moving to the windscreen, where she sits with legs apart. The video further shows an armed male officer appears reluctant to apprehend the woman.

The woman's actions are widely being perceived as a form of demonstration against Iran's increasingly restrictive clothing regulations for women. *—Agencies*

Rural FMCG growth outpaces urban for fourth quarter

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The fast-moving consumer goods (FMCG) sector experienced a robust 10.6 per cent growth in value during the December quarter of 2024, according to a report by NielsenIQ. Notably, rural markets have outperformed large urban markets for the fourth consecutive quarter, primarily driven by festive demand. Despite inflationary pressures leading to a 3.3 per cent increase in average prices, overall volume growth in the FMCG sector rose by 7.1 per cent. Small sachet-based products in rural areas doubled their growth rate compared to urban markets, with rural volume growth reaching 9.9 per cent, up from 5.7 per cent in the previous quarter. Traditional trade channels, including local Kirana shops, reported an 8.1 per cent increase in sales volume for the December quarter, contrasting with a 1.1 per cent decline in modern trade. *—PTI*

CleanMax, Amazon to open 100MW project in K'taka

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

CleanMax on Thursday said it has signed a power purchase agreement with Amazon for a 100 MW renewable energy solutions. As part of the Power Purchase Agreement (PPA) with Amazon, CleanMax said it will develop and operate the wind energy project in Koppal, Karnataka. The project will be connected to the national grid and will help match the electricity consumed by Amazon's operations. The wind farm is expected to be operational by second quarter of 2026, generating roughly 355 million kWh of clean electricity annually and offsetting an estimated 252,000 tonnes of CO_2 annually — equivalent to planting nearly 14.8 million trees each year. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Hexaware Tech's ₹8,750 crore IPO to open on 12 Feb

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Private equity major Carlyle Group-backed Hexaware Technologies Ltd fixed a price band of Rs 674 to Rs 708 per share for its Rs 8,750-crore initial public offering (IPO). The IPO will open for public subscription during 12 to 14 February. The bidding for anchor investors will open for a day on 11 February. The initial share-sale of the Mumbai headquartered company is a complete Offer-for-Sale (OFS) of Rs 8,750 crore by promoter CA Magnum Holdings, part of Carlyle Group. Since the entire issue is an OFS, all the proceeds from the IPO will go directly to the selling shareholder, rather than to the company. The equity shares are proposed to be listed on BSE and NSE. *—PTI*

Tata Power, BOB partner for solar financing

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Tata Power Renewable Energy Ltd (TPREL) has announced a collaboration with Bank of Baroda to finance residential rooftop solar projects under the PM - Surya Ghar Muft Bijli Yojana. The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) allows applicants to secure loans of up to Rs 6 lakh at interest rates starting from 7 per cent per annum. The initiative aims to provide solar power to one crore households by March 2027. Customers installing systems up to 3 kW can access loans of up to Rs 2 lakh with minimal requirements. Larger installations may receive loans with a 20 per cent margin. The scheme features flexible repayment plans up to 10 years, promoting affordable solar solutions for households across India. *—PTI*

Market falls for 2nd day ahead of RBI policy decision

Sensex drops by 213 points; Nifty declines by 92.95 points

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

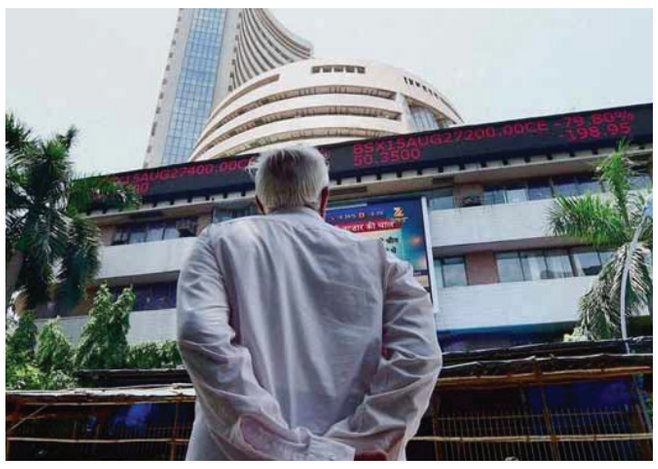
Benchmark indices Sensex and Nifty slid for the second consecutive day on Thursday amid caution ahead of the RBI's monetary policy decision and fresh foreign fund outflows.

The 30-share BSE Sensex dropped 213.12 points or 0.27 per cent to settle at 78,058.16 due to profit-taking in blue-chip shares such as Bharti Airtel, ITC and SBI. The index opened higher but slipped into the red in morning deals due to selling by investors. During the day, it tumbled 427.29 points or 0.54 per cent to 77,843.99. The NSE Nifty declined 92.95 points or 0.39 per cent to 23,603.35 with 30 of its constituents closing lower.

Among Sensex scrips, Bharti Airtel fell by 2.47 per cent to emerge as the biggest loser. Airtel after the market hours reported a five-fold jump in profit for the third quarter of 2024-25.

Titan, NTPC, State Bank of India, ITC, Tata Steel, Mahindra & Mahindra and Tata Motors were the major laggards.

Adani Ports, Infosys, Axis Bank, HCL Technologies, Tech Mahindra and IndusInd Bank were among the gainers.



Titan, NTPC, State Bank of India, ITC are the laggards *PHOTO: PTI*

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) on Wednesday started deliberations on the monetary policy and the decision will be announced on Friday.

"The benchmark indices experienced a moderate decline as investors awaited the RBI's decision on a potential rate cut amidst the ongoing trade war. The broader market remained cautious and in a consolidation phase despite the government's focus on boosting consumption to cushion lower growth," Vinod Nair, Head of Research, Geojit Financial Services, said.

"Despite logging sharp gains in the first few minutes of opening trade, markets slipped into the red and moved in a narrow range with a negative bias for most part of the trading session. Investors booked profits in rate-sensitive shares like realty and auto ahead of monetary policy announcement tomorrow," Prashanth Tapse, Senior VP (Research), Mehta Equities Ltd, said.

The BSE midcap gauge declined 0.87 per cent while smallcap index ended flat down 2.18 points.

Among BSE sectoral indices, realty tanked the most 2.15 per cent, followed by consumer durables (2.04 per cent), telecommunication (1.73 per cent), consumer discretionary (1.34 per cent), power (1.16 per cent) and auto (0.86 per cent).

BSE healthcare, IT, services, bankex and BSE Focused IT were the gainers.

Meanwhile, Shares of food and grocery delivery major Swiggy on Thursday ended almost 7 per cent lower after the firm reported widening of consolidated loss to Rs 799.08 crore for the December quarter. The stock declined 6.98 per cent to settle at Rs 388.90 on the BSE. Intra-day, it tumbled 7.58 per cent to Rs 386.40 -- the 52-week low level. At the NSE, the stock dropped 6.29 per cent to Rs 391.75. During the day, it tanked 7.84 per cent to hit the 52-week low of Rs 385.25.

The company's market valuation diminished Rs 5,517.6 crore to Rs 88,071.88 crore.

In traded volume terms, 24.28 lakh shares of the firm were traded at the BSE and 412.30 lakh shares on the NSE during the day. *—PTI*

INTEREST RATE CUT

Rupee falls to record low of 87.57 against US dollar

MUMBAI, 6 FEB

PHOTO:FREEPIK

The Indian rupee plunged by 14 paise to a historic low of 87.57 against the US dollar on Thursday, driven by speculation regarding a potential interest rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) in its upcoming monetary policy meeting. The local currency has depreciated over 2 per cent this year alone, following a nearly 3 per cent decline in the USD/INR pair in 2024, making it one of the worst-performing currencies in Asia.

At the start of the year, the rupee was valued at 83.21 against the dollar. Forex traders indicated that the rupee's negative outlook stems from the ongoing global trade tensions, particularly tariffs imposed by the US and China. Additionally, concerns over rate cuts by the RBI and the strengthening of the US dollar adversely affected investor sentiment.

Opening at 87.54, the rupee quickly fell to its all-time low of 87.58 in the interbank foreign exchange market, following a decline of 36 paise on Wednesday, when it closed at 87.43. Since January, the rupee has lost 194 paise, with present quotes showing 85.64 against the dollar.

Market analysts, including Anil Kumar Bhansali, Head of Treasury at Finrex Treasury Advisors LLP, noted that significant dollar purchases by foreign banks and oil companies have exacerbated the rupee's weakness, forecasting the currency to fluctuate between 87.30 and 87.60 in the coming days.

The RBI's Monetary Policy Committee started its three-day meeting on Wednesday, with decisions expected to be announced on 7 February. Meanwhile, the BSE Sensex and Nifty indices both recorded losses, reflecting broader market concerns. *—PTI*

After Meta, Google scraps its diversity-based hiring targets

CALFORNIA, 6 FEB

Google is eliminating some of its diversity hiring goals, joining a growing list of U.S. companies that have either reduced or abandoned their diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives.

This decision, communicated to Google employees in an email on Wednesday, follows an executive order from President Donald Trump, which aimed to pressure government contractors into discontinuing their DEI programs.

Like other major tech firms, Google provides technology and services to the federal government, including its rapidly expanding cloud division, which plays a key role in its artificial intelligence efforts.

In addition, Google's parent company, Alphabet, reflected this change in its annual 10-K filing with the Securities and Exchange Commission this week. The report omitted a line previously included in annual filings, which stated the company's commitment to integrating diversity, equity, and inclusion in its operations and building a workforce that mirrors the users it serves.

PHOTO:X

The change in language also comes slightly more than two weeks after Google CEO Sundar Pichai and other prominent technology executives — including Tesla CEO Elon Musk, Amazon founder Jeff Bezos, Apple CEO Tim Cook and Meta Platforms CEO Mark Zuckerberg — stood behind Trump during his inauguration.

Google's Chief People Officer, Fiona Cicconi, informed employees that the company would no longer maintain its ''aspirational hiring goals,'' a strategy which was launched in 2020 to enhance workforce representation. Earlier, the firm goal was a 30 per cent surge in leadership from the underrepresented groups by 2025. Google used to give preference to diversity following the racial justice reports of 2020. As far as the latest development, it has eliminated public commitments to DEI from its latest US Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC) filing. *—PTI*

PHOTO:FREEPIK

Gold rises ₹270 to all-time high of ₹86,070 per 10g

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Continuing the record-setting trend, gold prices climbed Rs 270 to hit a new lifetime high of Rs 86,070 per 10 grams in the national capital on Thursday as the rupee slid to all-time low levels and stock markets closed with losses.

Gold of 99.5 per cent purity gained Rs 270 to hit a new high of Rs 85,670 per 10 grams. Sustained buying by local jewellers, a weak rupee and losses in equity market aided the rally in the yellow metal, traders said. In this year, the yellow metal has soared by Rs 6,680 per 10 grams or 8.41 per cent on safe-haven demand and firm global trends.

However, silver prices remained flat at Rs 96,500 per kg.

On Thursday, the rupee plunged 14 paise to close at an all-time low of 87.57 (provisional) against the US dollar as rising odds of a rate cut by the Reserve Bank of India in its monetary policy meeting on Friday pressurised the rupee. A weak rupee makes the dollar-priced gold imports dearer. *—PTI*

TCS cuts quarterly variable pay for senior staff

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS) has cut the quarterly variable pay (QVA) for senior employees for the second consecutive quarter, despite their compliance with the company's work-from-office policy, a Moneycontrol report cites sources.

In the July-September 2024 (Q2FY25) quarter, some employees received only 20-40 per cent of their QVA, while others got nothing. This is a significant drop compared to the nearly 70 per cent payouts in Q1FY25. The October-December 2024 quarter saw further cuts, with some employees receiving only 25 per cent of their expected variable pay.

TCS reported a net profit of Rs 12,380 crore for Q3FY25, marking an 11.9 per cent increase from Rs 11,058 crore in Q3FY24. *—Agencies*

Indirect tax up 8.3%, corporate tax 10.4% in FY26

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

A report by ICICI Bank has projected an 8.3 per cent increase in the Indian government's indirect tax collection for the financial year 2025-26 (FY26), surpassing the 7.1 per cent growth anticipated for FY25. This increase is primarily attributed to a boost in goods and services tax (GST) revenue spurred by strong urban consumption.

Corporate tax collections are also expected to accelerate, with a projected rise of 10.4 per cent in FY26, compared to 7.6 per cent in FY25. The government's overall spending is projected to grow by 7.4.per cent in FY26, slightly above the 6.1 per cent increase seen the previous year, emphasising the commitment to support economic growth.

Capital expenditure for infrastructure development is estimated to increase by 10.1 per cent, although it will remain stable at 3.1 per cent of GDP for both FY25 and FY26. Meanwhile, the government has revised down its fiscal deficit to 4.8 per cent of GDP in FY25.

With a moderate current account deficit and increasing remittances and services exports, the report highlights a positive economic outlook for India in the upcoming financial year. *—ANI*

'India's debt to fall to 50-51% with 10.5% growth'

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

A report by SBI Funds has predicted that if India maintains a nominal growth rate of 10.5 per cent, the country's fiscal deficit could drop to 4 per cent of GDP in the next financial year (FY26). The report foresees the government's debt decreasing to between 50-51 per cent by March 2031, provided this growth rate is upheld until FY31.

According to the analysis, achieving a nominal growth of 10.5 per cent, coupled with a fiscal deficit consolidation to 4 per cent next year, enables the government to adhere to its target of reducing the debt-to-GDP ratio, as outlined in the Fiscal Responsibility and Budget Management (FRBM) document.

PHOTO:X

SBI Funds asserts that maintaining a 4 per cent fiscal deficit at the Centre, alongside a 3 per cent deficit for states, would align with conditions deemed favourable for an S&P credit rating upgrade. Should India experience slightly higher nominal growth at 11 per cent, further cuts to the fiscal deficit may not be necessary, as targets for debt reduction could still be achieved even at a 4.4 per cent deficit.

This assessment indicates that India can effectively balance economic growth with fiscal prudence without imposing severe spending restraints. The government's commitment to debt reduction reflects a broader global trend prioritising lower debt levels for financial stability and superior credit ratings.

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With steady economic growth, India is poised to manage its fiscal deficit while controlling public debt. *—ANI*

LOGO UNVEILED

Zomato Ltd rebranded as Eternal in 'ambitious move', food app retains name

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

Zomato Ltd on Thursday announced that its board has apporved the change of name of the company to Eternal Ltd., marking a significant transformation in its corporate identity.

Deepinder Goyal, CEO, Zomato made this announcement on his official social media handle on X by posting the formal announcement letter.

The decision, approved by the company's Board, reflects Zomato's evolution beyond food delivery, with businesses like Blinkit, District, and Hyperpure now playing a crucial role in its future.

PHOTO: X

In a heartfelt message to shareholders, Goyal shared his reflections on the company's journey. He recalled how Zomato—originally launched as Foodiebay in 2007--had its humble beginnings as a simple website to upload restaurant menus. Over the years, the company defied the odds to become India's first tech startup to be listed on the BSE Sensex, a moment he described as a source of both pride and responsibility.

"This journey has created tremendous wealth — not just for me, but for our employees, institutional investors, and retail shareholders. But I did not start Zomato to make money. I started it because I wanted to do something worthwhile with my life," Goyal stated.

The decision to rename Zomato Ltd to Eternal Ltd stems from the company's broader vision of building an enduring institution that lasts beyond its current leadership.

"We shape our institutions, and then they shape us," he said, emphasizing that Eternal is more than just a name change—it represents a mission statement.

With Blinkit emerging as a major driver of growth the leadership felt that the time was right for a rebranding that encapsulates the company's expanding portfolio. Following shareholder approval, the company will transition its corporate website from zomato.com to eternal.com and change its stock ticker from ZOMATO to ETERNAL. *—ANI*

KIA India accused of $155 million tax evasion

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

PHOTO:X

Kia India has been served with a tax demand notice amounting to USD 155 million by the tax authorities, who allege the automaker made incorrect declarations regarding imports of components for its premium model, the Carnival. In response, Kia has firmly denied any wrongdoing.

The company affirmed its commitment to legal compliance and transparency in all its operations, stating, "As a responsible and law-abiding brand, we are dedicated to following all regulatory requirements."

Kia also expressed its willingness to cooperate fully with the relevant authorities and confirmed that a comprehensive response, backed by substantial evidence and documentation, has already been submitted.

Due to the ongoing review by the authorities, Kia has refrained from offering further commentary on the situation, emphasising its determination to adhere to all regulatory processes. This development follows legal troubles faced by Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, which has initiated action against tax authorities concerning an alleged customs duty fraud involving a staggering Rs 11,000 crore showcause notice linked to imports of vehicles as completely knocked down units. *—PTI*

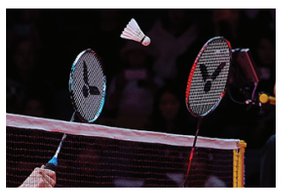

PHOTO: X

BWF to test new 3x15 badminton scoring system

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

To attract a new audience to the sport and make the matches shorter, the Badminton World Federation (BWF) is set to trial a new 3x15 scoring system in selected competitions for at least six months, starting April this year. The existing format offers 21-point best-of-three-game matches (3x21). The BWF Council, the decision-making body of the world governing body, endorsed the 3x15 scoring system, which is already part of the Alternative Laws of Badminton, to replace the current scoring system during its meeting in Kuala Lumpur in November. "As part of its due diligence, BWF Council approved a plan to practically test the 3 x 15 (setting to 21) system at selected Continental Championships, Grade 3 tournaments, national and international leagues, and national tournaments from approximately April to September/October 2025," BWF said.—*PTI*

SC gives elected body control of Kabbadi Federation

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

The Supreme Court on Thursday asked the Amateur Kabaddi Federation of India (AKFI) administrator former judge SP Garg to hand over the charge to its elected governing body by 11 February. A bench of Justices Surya Kant and N Kotiswar Singh said though certain issues needed a closer look, it was an ad hoc arrangement to facilitate players to participate in the upcoming Asian Kabaddi Championship scheduled to be held between 20 and 25 February in Iran. The bench, while lauding the work done by Garg, said the entrustment of charge did not mean the court recognized the body elected in December 2023. —*PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Gujarat Giants set for historic home debut

NEW DELHI, 6 FEB

As thethird season of the Women's Premier League approaches, Gujarat Giants isgearing up for its home debut at a new venue in Vadodara. On Thursday, the teamheld a press event in Ahmedabad attended by Head Coach Michael Klinger, playersHarleen Deol and Shabnam Shakil, and Adani Sportsline's CBO, Sanjay Adesara.GujaratGiants also unveiled its jersey for WPL 2025, which is set to begin on March 14and will be played across multiple venues, including Vadodara, Bengaluru,Lucknow, and Mumbai.Addressingmedia at the event.—*PTI*

Gaddafi stadium is ready for Int'l cricket: PCB

LAHORE, 6 FEB

The Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) on Thursday announced that the renovation and upgradation work at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium has been completed in a record time of 117 days and it is now ready to host international matches, including the ICC Champions Trophy. The PCB said in a statement that the new-look stadium now has better facilities, new floodlights, hospitality boxes, increased seating capacity, electronic scoreboards, and top-of-the-line LED towers. "I am grateful to all those people who put in day and night of work to get the stadium ready on time despite the apprehensions and criticism," PCB Chief Mohsin Naqvi said.—*PTI*

Gill, bowlers shine as India ease past England by 4 wkts

Debutant Harshit Rana dazzled with the ball

NAGPUR, 6 FEB

Vice-captain Shubman Gill orchestrated India's chase with grace, while debutant Harshit Rana dazzled with the ball as the hosts registered a four-wicket win against England in the series opener here on Thursday.

Gill (87), Shreyas Iyer (59), and Axar Patel (52) rose to the occasion, guiding India to a commanding chase after Rana (3/53 from 7 overs) and the seasoned left-arm spinner Ravindra Jadeja (3/26 from 9) shared six wickets between them, dismantling England for a below-par 248.

Rana's fourth over, which claimed the twin wickets of Ben Duckett and Harry Brook, decisively stifled the England innings, putting India firmly in control as the visitors never managed to rebuild despite fifties by skipper Jos Buttler (52) and Jack Bethell (51).

Chasing a below-250 score, Gill anchored the innings, forging key partnerships with Iyer and Axar that became the backbone of India's chase.He adapted perfectly to the match situation, playing the perfect foil to Iyer when the Mumbai batter was in full flow, then stepping up as the mainstay, steering India towards victory. Iyer, walking in at 19/2, unleashed a counter-attacking knock, filled with sizzling shots, including back-to-back sixes one a pull shot over deep mid-wicket off Jofra Archer and the other a reverse switch-hit four off Adil Rashid.

India 251 for 6 (Gill 87, Shreyas 59, Axar 52, Rashid 2-49) beat England 248 (Buttler 52, Bethell 51, Jadeja 3-26) by four wickets. —*PTI*

India's Shreyas Iyer celebrates his half-century with Shubman Gill during the first One Day International (ODI) cricket match between India and England at (VCA) Stadium, in Nagpur **PHOTO: PTI**

Rohit fails again

India captain Rohit Sharma's woeful form with the bat continued as the 37-year-old got out for a seven-ball 2 in the first ODI against England at the Vidarbha Cricket Association (VCA) Stadium here on Thursday. Playing his first ODI at home since the 2023 World Cup in which he re-introduced himself as an all-out aggressive batter, Rohit struggled to time the ball and spooned an easy catch to mid-on as he attempted to whip an inswinger off his legs but got the toe-end off the bat. It was a disappointing end for the India captain in a format in which he is considered the best-ever.

MAJOR BLOW FOR AUSTRALIA

Marcus Stoinis calls time on ODI career

MELBOURNE, 6 FEB

The pace duo of skipper Pat Cummins and Josh Hazlewood joined the injured list while all-rounder **Marcus Stoinis** shockingly called it quits from ODIs to vacate his place as Australia's Champions Trophy squad unraveled just days before the tournament.

The eight-team Champions Trophy begins on 19 February and Australia has until 12 February to make at least four changes to their provisional squad of 15 after Cummins and Hazlewood joined all-rounder Mitchell Marsh in the injured category.

Complicating matters was Stoinis, who declared on Thursday that he would no longer play the ODI format to "fully focus on the next chapter" of his career, which might mean freelancing in T20 leagues. The 35-year-old, who has never played Tests, was picked in the provisional squad and will remain available for national duty in T20 Internationals.

Cummins has not recovered from the ankle niggle that plagued him towards the end of the recent Border-Gavaskar Trophy Test series against India, while Hazlewood is still recuperating from a calf strain.

PHOTO: X

Hazlewood's last competitive outing was against India in the drawn third Test in Brisbane.

The turmoil has hit the country's national selectors just days before the quadrennial showpiece gets underway on 19 February. While India will play all their matches in Dubai owing to security concerns, Australia will be based in Pakistan, the original host of the event. —*PTI*

The right-arm pacer has 29 wickets in 26 matches and has two fifties with the bat, while his List A record is brilliant, where he has
135 WICKETS
in 95 matches at an
Marcus Stoinis shockingly called it quits

38TH NATIONAL GAMES

Prajwal Dev carries K'taka to gold medal match

DEHRADUN, 6 FEB

SD Prajwal Dev won both his singles and doubles matches against Services Sports Control Board (SSCB) to steer top seeds Karnataka to the final of the tennis event at the National Games here on Thursday. Karnataka, the reigning champions, will take on second seeds Tamil Nadu in the gold medal match on Friday.

Tamil Nadu overcame a formidable Maharashtra 2-1 in the other semifinal. Niki Poonacha played the first match, losing 4-6, 6-1, 1-6 to Services' Rishab Agarwal. He played solidly to come through 6-2, 3-6, 6-3 to take the match to the decisive doubles rubber. After a break, Prajwal teamed up with Niki, with whom he had won a Challenger doubles title two years ago, to defeat Faisal Qamar and Rishab Agarwal 6-3 6-4 and storm into the final. In a late evening quarterfinal on Wednesday, Karnataka women bowed out of medal contention with a 1-2 loss to Tamil Nadu.

Lovlina, Shiva won in boxing

Olympic medallist Lovlina Borgohain and six-time Asian champion Shiva Thapa led the way with commanding wins in their respective boxing bouts at the 38th National Games here on Thursday. In the men's light welterweight (63.5kg) division, Assam's Shiva Thapa, a seasoned international boxer, demonstrated his experience to outclass Maharashtra's Harivansh Tiwari in an intense contest.

Niraj upstages Olympic bronze medallist Swapnil

Indian Navy's Niraj upstages Olympic bronze medallist Swapnil and Aishwary to win National Games gold Indian Navy's Niraj Kumar stunned Paris Olympics bronze medallist Swapnil Kumar. —*PTI*

Kusal Mendis fights for SL

GALLE, 6 FEB

Australia's trio of specialist bowlers toiled manfully during a see-saw day one against a fighting Sri Lanka on a dry Galle surface that did not live up to the hype, but occasionally spun sharply and is expected to deteriorate significantly.

By the end of 90 overs, the second Test was intriguingly poised after several shifts of momentum. Sri Lanka's top-order built a strong platform to reach 93 for 1 before they lost 4 for 34 in a horror period after lunch. But Kusal and Ramesh combined for a seventh-wicket partnership of 65 to lift Sri Lanka to what might just be a competitive first-innings total. Sri Lanka 229 for 9 (Chandimal 74, K Mendis 59*, Starc 3-37, Lyon 3-78) vs Australia. —*PTI*

SCHEDULE ANNOUNCED FOR AUSTRALIA'S TOUR OF WI

ST JOHN'S, 6 FEB

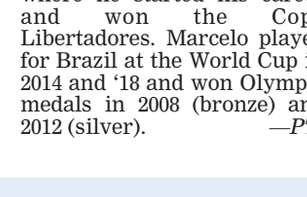

PHOTO: X

Australia will tour the Caribbean in June and July for a three-Test series and five Twenty20 internationals, the West Indies Cricket Board announced Wednesday. It will be Australia's first Test tour of the West Indies since 2015 and the first three-Test series between the countries since the West Indies tour of Australia in 2015-16.

The first Test in the Frank Worrell Trophy series is set to be played at Bridgetown, Barbados beginning 25 June. The second Test is scheduled to start on July 3 in St. George's, Grenada, and the third on July 12 in Kingston, Jamaica.Sabina Park in Kingston will also be the venue for the first two T20s on July 20 and 22, with the remaining three T20s to be played at Basseterre, St. Kitts on 25, 26, and 28 July. The West Indies series will start two weeks after Australia plays South Africa in the World Test Championship final at Lord's, beginning 11 June. —*PTI*

Neymar makes Santos return after 12 years

SANTOS, 6 FEB

Neymar took powerful shots from the edge of the box and ran above his expectations in 52 minutes on the pitch for Santos on Wednesday in his first game for the Brazilian club since his return last week.

The 33-year-old striker just couldn't leave the pitch of Vila Belmiro Stadium with a win on his birthday Santos drew a 1-1 draw with Botafogo Ribeirao Preto, a team fighting relegation in the Sao Paulo state championship.

"I need more minutes, more matches. I am not 100%, but I didn't expect to run as much as I did tonight," Neymar, who is still recovering from ACL surgery, told journalists. "I will be much better three, four games from now."

He replaced Gabriel Bontempo after the break.

Saudi club Al-Hilal terminated Neymar's contract by mutual consent last week, six months early, after he played only seven matches since September 2023. The ACL injury sidelined him for a year until October.

Neymar has signed a six-month contract with Santos, which he said could be extended.

Santos opened the scoring before 20,000 fans when Tiquinho Soares converted a penalty in the 38th minute. Alexandre Jesus equalized with a header in the 67th. Santos wasted several scoring opportunities, including two clear chances after Neymar passed. Once the final whistle was blown, players from the visiting team raced to take pictures with the star. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

Mattia stuns Medvedev

MADRID, 6 FEB

Italian qualifier Mattia Bellucci stunned former world number one Daniil Medvedev in three tough sets on Wednesday to reach the Rotterdam ATP quarter-finals.

The 23-year-old left-hander, playing on a career-high ranking of 92, came through 6-3, 6-7 (6/8), 6-3 to record a first win over a top 10 opponent. "It was a three-hour match and I enjoyed every moment of it. I tried to do the best I could. I'm pretty tired but I'm happy," said Bellucci.

"I was going for the serve and volley which is not something I'm used to doing but it worked pretty well today." —*PTI*

'JOURNEY ENDS HERE'

Real Madrid great Marcelo retires

MADRID, 6 FEB

Marcelo, the former Real Madrid and Brazil left-back, announced his retirement on Thursday at the age of 36.

In a video on X, Marcelo said: "My journey as a player ends here, but I still have so much to give to football. Thank you for everything."

An attacking left back, Marcelo had one of the most trophy-filled careers in soccer history thanks to his time at Madrid from 2007-22 and his return to boyhood Brazilian club Fluminense across 2023-24.

At Madrid, he won the Champions League five times, the Spanish League six times, and 25 titles in total.

"Marcelo is part of the history of Real Madrid and is one of the great legends of our club and world football," Madrid said. After a brief spell with Olympiakos in Greece, Marcelo moved to Fluminense where he started his career and won the Copa Libertadores. Marcelo played for Brazil at the World Cup in 2014 and '18 and won Olympic medals in 2008 (bronze) and 2012 (silver). —*PTI*

REAL MADRID BEAT LEGANES 3-2

MADRID, 6 FEB

Gonzalo Garcia scored in stoppage time as Real Madrid avoided an upset by defeating Leganes 3-2 to reach the semi-finals of the Copa del Rey. Madrid had taken a two-goal lead at half-time with Luka Modric and Endrick before the hosts rallied to even the match in the second half. The 20-year-old Garcia, a striker who usually plays with Madrid's "B" team, sealed the victory with a header. —*PTI*

PHOTO: X

1ST TITLE CHASE IN 70 YRS

Newcastle beat Arsenal, reach League Cup final

LONDON, 6 FEB

Newcastle is back in the English League Cup final for another chance to end its 70-year wait for a major domestic trophy.

The Saudi-controlled northeast club beat Arsenal 2-0 in the second leg of the semifinals Wednesday to advance 4-0 on aggregate. Jacob Murphy and Anthony Gordon scored the goals at a boisterous St. James' Park.

For Newcastle, it marks another opportunity to capture the first piece of silverware since being bought by Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund in 2021. Newcastle's last trophy was the now-defunct Inter-Cities Fairs Cup in 1969 and the most recent domestic title was the FA Cup in 1955.

Newcastle reached the 2023 League Cup final but lost 2-0 to Manchester United. "Play like that and we can dream big," Newcastle captain Bruno Guimaraes said after the Arsenal match. "It would be amazing in my first season as the captain to lift a trophy, it

Newcastle is back in the English League Cup final for another chance to end its 70-year wait for a major domestic trophy. **PHOTO: X / @NUFC**

- Newcastle reached the 2023 League Cup final but lost 2-0 to Manchester United. "Play like that and we can dream big," Newcastle captain Bruno Guimaraes said after the Arsenal match.

USGA creates U.S. Open exemption for LIV Golf

LONDON, 6 FEB

The US Golf Association (USGA) has created an exemption category for LIV Golf players to compete in the U.S. Open, making the tournament the first of golf's four majors to introduce a formal pathway for golfers on the Saudi-backed circuit, it said on Wednesday.

One spot in the 156-player field for the June 12-15 U.S. Open in Oakmont, Pennsylvania will be awarded to a golfer who is not otherwise exempt and in the top three of the LIV Golf Individual Standings as of 19 May.

In both cases, the spots are for players not already exempt and among the top three in the standings. "The USGA continues to evaluate the pathways that exist to ensure those playing their best have the opportunity to compete in our national championship," said John Bodenhamer, USGA chief championships officer.

"Consistent with our historical approach, we continuously evaluate talent levels on professional tours and in amateur events, which has led us to add a new exemption category."

While LIV Golf players had been eligible to play in golf's majors, there had previously been no direct pathway for them into the blue-riband events. —*PTI*